THE LENGTHENED SHADOW

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

Mrs. H. P. Upham

Grace Upham Bigelow

26 via Paisiello

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1923

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THE LENGTHENED SHADOW

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IDOLS
JAFFERY
VIVIETTE
SEPTIMUS
DERELICTS
THE USURPER
STELLA MARIS
WHERE LOVE IS
THE ROUGH ROAD
THE MOUNTEBANK
THE RED PLANET
THE WHITE DOVE
FAR-AWAY STORIES
SIMON THE JESTER
THE TALE OF TRIONA
A STUDY IN SHADOWS
A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY
THE WONDERFUL YEAR
THE HOUSE OF BALTAZAR
THE FORTUNATE YOUTH
THE BELOVÈD VAGABOND
AT THE GATE OF SAMARIA
THE GLORY OF CLEMENTINA
THE MORALS OF MARCUS ORDEYNE
THE DEMAGOGUE AND LADY PHAYRE
THE JOYOUS ADVENTURES OF ARISTIDE PUJOL

THE LENGTHENED SHADOW

BY

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

Author of "The Beloved Vagabond," "The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne," etc.

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CHAPTER I

TIMOTHY SWAYNE dated all his troubles from the day when a butter-fingered nursemaid dropped him on the bathroom floor. He did not remember the dropping, for it happened when he was six months old; nor did he remember the nursemaid, instantaneously driven forth into an engulfing world; nor the baby years of supine inactivity; nor the gradual success of parents and doctors in putting him fairly on his feet. But he did acutely remember his boyhood's handicap of a lame hip which made him either the spectator of soul-stirring games, or compelled him to a solitude, which, in spite of boredom, his mental equipment could not render studious. Caring little for Latin, uninspired by Greek, feebly interested in Trigonometry, and taking scant joy in general reading of a mind-improving order, he ended an inglorious and yet impeccable school career in the Lower Fifth. Of that he did not complain. So had God made him. But of the handicap that precluded all chance of becoming captain of cricket or football he complained most bitterly. So had the nursemaid made him.

Had it not been for that young woman he might have led companies, regiments, brigades, divisions to victory and have had his breast covered with ribbons from that

of the Victoria Cross downwards. As it was, he found himself for most of the war years stewing for twelve hours a day in a dreary little English country town, the Headquarters of an Army Pay Department Command. It was war, but it was not magnificent. The only glory he got out of it was during his infrequent leaves, when he could limp about London with his captain's three pips on his sleeve and pathetically hope that the unobservant might take him for a hero of Mons. In the little country town he had no such hope. There everybody knew him, and he regarded his pips as a cynical irony.

But for the nursemaid he would not have begun and continued life with the shynesses and timidities of a creature cut off from the interests of his fellows and lacking interests of his own. He would have made friends at school; in the Chartered Accountants' office which he entered at eighteen; among his clients when he became a junior partner in the firm; in the army; during his post-war Chartered Accountancy. But for the nursemaid he could have chosen among the women of his generation a wife who would have accomplished his manhood and filled his days with joy.

For Timothy once had a wife, though it cannot be said that he chose her. She was a little, anxious-faced music teacher who had rooms above Timothy in his Kensington lodging-house. Now Timothy had a piano on which he played with the mild enthusiasm of the ungifted amateur. One evening, his professional neighbour, driven down to his rooms by frayed nerves, begged him to desist. Thus acquaintance was made. Timothy, kind soul, gave up his recreation, and occasionally mounted to the lady's room where she played him dreamy music and sang him "Songs of Araby" and worked upon him her meagre stock of the

arts of fascination. Lonely, shy, friendless, he yielded to the spell, regarding it as a miracle that he, of all creatures, should be the object of a woman's delight. She was pretty in a thin-lipped, pinched, blonde fashion, and her body was lithe and yielding when first, to his wonderment, she put her arms around his neck and compelled him to a reciprocating clasp. Then Timothy was undone. Soon afterwards she took him confused and grateful to St. Mary Abbot's church, where she made him endow her with all his worldly goods according to the law of the land.

For Timothy their short married life was a period of bleak disillusion. He quickly realized that she desired not him, Timothy, but any kind of reputable and food providing male. She had all the ill-tempered ungenerosities of a nerve-racked woman who resented the stab of conscience. She claimed luxurious living, the dreams of her penury, motor-car, restaurant dinners, champagne, jewellery, costly clothes—infinitely beyond his means. She taunted him with his infirmity, his lack of initiative, his social stagnation. . . . She refused to believe in the simple budget of ways and means which he put before her. Her mother had known a chartered accountant who made twenty thousand a year. She disbelieved in his tale of a few hundreds. She laid plans which would have landed him in the Bankruptcy Court, when Nature, to her infinite annoyance, bade her wait awhile.

The married life of Timothy Swayne was more of a nightmare than a dream of bliss. But, like a perfect nightmare, it was mercifully short. The child of distaste was born. The mother paid mortal penalty. A large-bosomed sister of Timothy, one Gertrude Barton, wife of a west-country parson and mother of eight, carried off

the babe from the helpless widower and, like Mrs. Gargery, brought it up by hand.

And then Timothy, in his inglorious way, went to the wars.

Here, incidentally, Timothy did not appreciate his luck. If the War Office had realized that a lame chartered accountant was seeking employment in the only sphere in which he could be useful to his country, i. e., in the Army Pay Department, it would have indignantly denied him a commission and sent him to clean latrines in a training camp. He was the one person in Great Britain who caught the War Office napping.

This, in brief, is the history of Timothy Swayne till the day we find him long since demobilized and still most junior partner in the firm of Combermere, Son & Combermere, Chartered Accountants, St. Mary Axe, London, E.C., gazing unintelligently at a small girl of nine in the drawing-room of a modest house in Montpellier Square, South Kensington. She was delicate, dark and old for her age. She answered to the name of Naomi.

It was a characterless drawing-room, got together in a hurry, like the rest of the house, by a firm in the Tottenham Court Road. Mrs. Barton's own family being about to reach the preposterous total of eleven, the small Naomi had been crowded out of a vicarage which had at last exceeded its coefficient of elasticity.

"I can do with eleven," wrote his sister, "but the twelfth that is on its way plays the devil with everything. Either one of my own children or Naomi must sleep in the spidery summer-house in the garden. So the time has come for you to pull yourself together and get a home of your own where Naomi can be free of spiders."

Mrs. Barton was a motherly woman. She loved her unfortunate brother. She loved Naomi. And the Rev. Roderick Barton was a large-hearted man.

"But there are limits to everything, my dear fellow," he wrote. "Except, apparently," thought Timothy, "to the good Roderick's family."

"I'm afraid you'll be rather dull here, dear," said he.

"There'll be children about somewhere," she replied, with a grave air of assurance.

"I believe there are quite a lot in London," said he, "but as a matter of fact I don't know any."

"Then it will be dull," said Naomi.

And it was. The Devonshire nursemaid chosen by Mrs. Barton took the child for walks and generally ministered to her physical needs; but she was a poor playmate. Not quite so poor, however, as Timothy, who had never played with a child in his life, and whose sole inspiration, when conversation flagged, which it invariably did after a couple of questions and two monosyllabic answers, was to endeavour to teach her chess. And then——

"What are you doing, my dear? The knight can only move two squares this way and one square that way. Don't you see?"

"But he doesn't care. He's going to rescue the Queen from that awful horrid black knight who's going to carry her off and put her into the awful horrid black castle. Boom!"

And the valiant white knight would charge his black adversary and send him flying off the board and would take up the Queen behind him and race to the security of the white lines, where they hid behind the two white castles placed close together.

"That's how Phoebe and I used to play," she explained.

"But that's not the proper way."

"I think proper ways are silly," said Naomi.

Timothy sighed, conscious of an unbridgeable gulf between them.

"Perhaps you'd try to learn the proper way, which isn't silly at all, just to please me."

Her child's heart yielding to his appeal, the game would recommence, and she would dutifully move her pieces in accordance with his directions, until bored to death——

"Can't Teddy play instead of me? He's frightfully clever."

And the dirty Teddy Bear, sitting at the edge of the table and regarding the game with intense black eyes, was made to act clumsily in her stead, until he sprawled nose foremost over the board and dislocated the whole campaign.

"I'm going to shut him up in a dungeon and feed him on bread and water."

Wherefore forgetful of chess and duty she would glide to the ground and with cushion and footstools and chairs make, in childhood's strenuous eagerness, an irrefragable prison for the unmoved animal who looked ever in front of him with big, penetrating, trustful, boot-button eyes. Later, she would confide in the nursemaid, Emma.

"I love daddy, but he has no 'magination."

And Timothy, unaware of this piercing diagnosis, would wonder ruefully why his little daughter and himself should have nothing in common. For he loved her, in his matter-of-fact way, and sensitively conscientious, strove to do his duty by her. On his return from the office he looked forward to the greeting clasp of the tiny

arms and the kiss on her fresh lips. A creature of method, he bought her a toy at Harrod's twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, which soon became red-letter days in the child's life. She too had method. She had set her heart on a well-stocked farmyard, primarily inspired by the chance gift of a cowshed (with cows) which the saleswoman had assured him would be an appropriate present for a little girl of nine. So, at every Monday and Thursday breakfast table, Naomi rattled off her list of farmyard desiderata; and the day's excitement consisted in speculation as to which of them would turn up. The grave, elderly-looking young man with the slight limp would be smilingly received by the saleswoman in the Toy Department.

"A well with a little man turning the handle? Of course. I've got several. Which would you like?"

"Whichever you think most suitable."

He would go home with the parcel and exhibit to Naomi's appreciative eyes a well with a little man beside whom, he realized too late, the pig family bought three days ago were on the scale of mastodons. But to his great relief, Naomi, obeying the unalterable law of childhood, cared nothing for scale. A man was a man and a pig a pig. Her joy contented him. It was only when she detached the bucket drawn up from the well by the little man and watered her gigantic pigs, upbraiding one for being greedy and condemning another to abstinence, in punishment for grave delinquencies during the day, that he felt himself a stupid alien in this vivid world of a child's creation. He longed to enter it intelligently. In a diffident fashion, he would take a stark-naked celluloid baby from a cot in the dolls' house.

"Don't you think he ought to have a drink?"

Only to be checked by eager little hands:

"Don't, Daddy. He's dead. Didn't I tell you yesterday he was run over by a motor-car—and his funeral's tomorrow?"

He had forgotten. He felt more alien than ever—somewhat humiliated. If he had had the wit and sympathy to say: "We'll have a splendid funeral in the morning and I'll make a coffin and be the parson and we'll bury him in the flower pot and all the animals shall be mourners," etcetera, etcetera—the child's mind would have leaped to him and they would have had a gorgeous time planning the ceremony before she went to sleep, and another gorgeous time in the morning carrying it out. But such things never entered Timothy's head. He kissed her good night and went rather sadly downstairs and read the evening paper over his solitary dinner.

The responsibility of Naomi frightened him. She must be educated. Her training in the manners of genteel society must be continued. She would grow older and older, to the never ceasing revolution and readjustment of his life. His shyness and aloofness from mankind made change a terror. His new establishment—after irresponsible rooms and occasional meals at his vast caravanserai of a club in Piccadilly, where he knew not a human soul—weighed heavily on his mind. It cost unimaginable money. Hitherto his bankers had paid into the Rev. Roderick's banking account a fixed sum per annum, and there his financial responsibilities in respect of Naomi ended. But now came people, of whose very existence he had formerly but a vague suspicion, holding out insatiable hands—plumbers, electricians, gasmen, milkmen, chemists, juvenile warehousemen, sweeps, rate collectors, people who dealt in firewood, insecticide,

lux, brooms and fire extinguishers. There were also a terrifying cook-housekeeper, a housemaid, a self-effacing Megaera (all pails and mops and grey-haired dishevelment), and the pink-cheeked Emma, who each in their several ways demanded post-war salaries and Pantagruelian meals. Timothy grudged them nothing. He was a man not exactly of generous impulses, for he had no impulses, having, as Naomi said, no 'magination—still he certainly had generous instincts. But from the day he left school, he had lived and thought in figures, and the figures of the present and those, much more alarming, of the future, under the headings of debit and credit, caused him to shiver with apprehension. Combermere, Son & Combermere was an old-fashioned house run in an old-fashioned way, and it held out few chances of an improved financial position. At the present rate of living, if he died within the next two or three years—he was getting on—nearly thirty-five—Naomi would be unprovided for. For himself he cared little. It had so seldom occurred to Timothy that he had a self, so ironically had circumstance down-trodden undue assertion of his ego. But he cared for Naomi—his only attachment to life—and Naomi's small individuality claimed this extraordinary establishment with its train of plumbers, rate collectors, cook-housekeepers, Emmas and the rest of them. Life was a much more complicated business than he had ever imagined. He shrank from it.

In his profession he had to deal with large affairs. But they appealed to him only in terms of figures—the checking of daybooks, ledgers, pass-books, profit and loss accounts, depreciation of stock, investments, liquid assets, outstanding liabilities, balance sheets—the phantasmagoria of the infinite permutations and combina-

tions of the ten digits representing pounds, shillings and pence. Of the human emotions, hopes, despairs, ambitions, loves, hatreds underlying this wilderness of ciphers he had no thought. Rascality, or crime, mean or splendid, left him unmoved. There were the figures, speaking dispassionately. In his sunless office in St. Mary Axe Timothy was a brain machine in whose accuracy it never occurred to him to take pride. These things from day to day had to be done and he did them. He never thought of them out of office hours; but in spells of freedom, especially on Sundays, he regretted the relaxed concentration of his mind and wondered vaguely what the deuce he could do with himself. At one period of his career he found morbid occupation in colouring meerschaums.

Later he became an amateur of boxing and, under the ironical aegis of young Combermere, joined the National Sporting Club. He also attended as many outside glove-fights as his means would allow, read deeply in the literature of the subject and dreamed of writing the lives of the famous pugilists. As he never spoke to anybody, save in shy answer to casual civilities of the occupants of neighbouring seats, no one suspected this ordinary looking lame young man with the scrubby dark moustache and ruffled hair and tired greyish-green eyes and mild melancholy face, of expertism in pugilistic lore.

But for that accursed nursemaid he might have been . . . "of all sad words of tongue or pen," etcetera, etcetera. Thus did Timothy cast bitter herbs even into the only wine of his delight.

One day young Combermere blew into his room. The slang phrase is not inaccurate. He had the irresponsible

likeness of an early autumn leaf, sped he cared not whither by any wind of heaven—a slender, dancing brown creature with laughing eyes—a thing of forty giving the illusion of prematurely withered eighteen.

"Look here—this Grabbiter business——"

"What Grabbiter business?" asked Timothy.

"Oh, it hasn't come your way. I remember. But you've got to get hold of it. I'm fed up. The old Grabbiter ass insists on one of the partners going down to Edgbaston, as he can't move for gout. Won't have Greening because he's only managing clerk—although he knows infinitely more about it than we do. The old man——" The old man was not the gouty client disrespectfully alluded to, but the head of the firm, an uncle of the young autumn leaf—— "The old man says I must go. But good God! How can I! I've got a golf tournament. You must take it on."

"I know nothing at all about it," Timothy objected. "You and your uncle——"

"He'll put you wise. You'll take it on, won't you? Ten o'clock train tomorrow."

"But—that's rather sudden. You see, Combermere, I have a little daughter. . . ."

"But damn it all, man, I have a golf tournament! I've made my arrangements long ago. You go to the old man and fix it up. A thousand thanks, Timothy."

He waved an airy hand and blew out of the room like a leaf.

So Timothy, junior partner, leaving Naomi in the care of Emma and the dread housekeeper and the house-maid and the mixture of Fate, Fury and Bedlamite to which in his mind was attached the label of Charwoman, caught the ten o'clock train from Paddington, engaged a room at

the Queen's Hotel, Birmingham, and with a taxiful of account books and documents, drove to the spacious and gorgeously appointed villa in Edgbaston where old Joseph Grabbiter had his habitation. And there, he spent a strenuous fortnight adjusting the affairs of old Joseph Grabbiter, who, afflicted with gout, could not attend at his Birmingham office.

Now the said Joseph Grabbiter, once a maker of ploughshares and other peaceful agricultural implements, had amassed a great fortune during the war. With the eyes of an old eagle he espied coming disaster in a bankrupt land and was retiring with his well- or ill-gotten gains from a business which supplied engines of destruction which nobody wanted and engines of utility which nobody now could pay for. The gross figures ran into hundreds of thousands of pounds. It was the biggest job Timothy had ever tackled. He spent a strenuous fortnight.

When the draft of the final statement was typed, he took it up to his client, who turned over the pages and curtly ordered Timothy to ring the bell. A forbidding old gentleman was Joseph Grabbiter. He had a very large clean-shaven red face and bushy dyed eyebrows and he wore a raven black wig. In his youth he had suffered from hair of violent carrot which in the process of decay had run the gamut of shades from carrot to dirty turnip. He had always hated his hair. So one day when he was sufficiently bald, he electrified his acquainted by appearing in the black hirsute travesty at which the glare in his hard blue eyes forbade any rash mortal to mock. He had never been a pleasant man to deal with, and the person who dared to treat him with light banter had never been born.

Timothy, who, after ringing the bell, feared an order for summary expulsion from the premises, was electrified to hear the order given to the manservant who appeared.

"Bring up a bottle of the '70, Taylor."

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Timothy had no desire in the world to drink port. He perspired at the suggestion. The swathed foot of his black-wigged and flame-faced client was a monstrous denunciation of the idea of port.

"Oh, not for me, please," he pleaded.

"You're going to drink it," snarled the old man. "And do you know why? I like you. You're worth the whole of your idiot shilly-shallying firm put together. You've done in a fortnight what the rest would have taken four months to do. Best firm in London—so they told me. God's Truth! The senior, a long-necked hypocrite with the face of a sanctimonious giraffe who goes on his knees for guidance before he dares to add up two and two together, and his nephew who has never added up two and two correctly and can't even pray. I've not met the other incapables of the firm. How many are there?"

"Four, beside myself," replied Timothy.

"Anyhow, I've met you. I know a capable man when I see him."

He turned the typed pages over again in silence. Presently a girl entered the library.

"Tea's ready, uncle."

"Go and drink it," snarled the old man.

"Wouldn't you like some tea, Mr. Swayne?" the girl asked off-handedly.

"I'm afraid——" Timothy began.

"What of?" asked old Grabbiter. "Her?" He

turned to the girl. "Mr. Swayne doesn't want wish-wash when there's better stuff to be had. We're busy."

He waved a dismissing hand. The girl, very tall, erect, self-possessed, smiled ironically and withdrew.

" 'Male and female created He them,' " growled the old man. "If He had had any previous experience He wouldn't have done it. The universe has been run by amateurs from the first day of Creation."

The port arrived. Joseph Grabbiter drank his accountant's health in two large glasses.

"I'll suffer for it tonight," said he. "But if you think you can get anything good out of this world without suffering, you're a fool. I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Swayne." He looked at his watch. "And now I suppose you'd like to get back to London."

Timothy returned gladly to town where he found an out-of-hand Naomi who demanded to know why the bi-weekly stocking of her farmyard had ceased. He had, in fact, not forgotten her. For he had written stiff little letters and had sent her a copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. But Emma reported, that her heart being set on a policeman to keep order in the farmyard, a faction of which was growing obstreperous, she had received the book with contumelious anger. In fact, she had torn out several pages. So between father and daughter a coolness arose; to the great despair of Timothy who sought refuge from consciousness of parental incapacity in an orgy of prize-fighting. You see, he would not give Naomi a policeman until she admitted contrition for her treatment of the *Pilgrim's Progress,* and Naomi would have nothing to do with Christian and his works until she had her policeman. In the meanwhile she gave unsatisfactory official power

to a one-eyed rabbit, who, besides looking a fool, could not keep order a bit.

"I can do nothing with her, sir," Emma complained. "She wants a good spanking."

"Possibly," said Timothy, with a wrinkled brow. "But who's to do it?"

He couldn't do it. To Emily he could not delegate such authority. There was no such official as public castigator of recalcitrant infants. So Timothy, yearning for the unclouded companionship of Naomi, weakly gave up the contest, and after scouring the toy shops of London for a toy policeman one and a half inches high, eventually had one made through the kindly interest of the young saleswoman at Harrod's and extracted from Naomi a formal apology for her misdeed. But Naomi having got the policeman, concrete symbol of her own way, saw no reason why she should not be presented with the earth, and on occasion, the sun, moon and stars. Her naughtinesses might have been recounted in the biography of a great female criminal. When Emma came down one evening, thrusting out a bitten hand, and, asseverated, with dangerous quickening of her slow Devonshire blood, that she had been engaged to look after a child and not a hyena, Timothy could do nothing else than give the outraged nursemaid a five-pound note and beg her for God's sake not to desert him. Emma stayed; but Naomi remained a terrifying problem.

Then all of a sudden, an angel dropped from Heaven.

She dropped one Sunday noon. The housemaid announced:

"A lady to see you, sir. Miss Chastel, she says her name is."

Miss Chastel. He seemed to have heard the name before, but where or when, he could not remember. When he went into the drawing-room, where he had asked the visitor to be shown, he met the tall, slender, self-possessed niece of old Joseph Grabbiter.

"You told me about your little girl," she said, after a few commonplaces. "I gathered you wanted a governess. If you like to try me, I am at your disposal. I've got to earn my own living, and I thought I had better come to you first."

"But your uncle, Mr. Grabbiter——?"

"Never mind my uncle. You know who I am. Quite respectable. I know nothing about children, but I'm not going to stand nonsense from anybody. I've got my *brevet supérieur* which qualifies me to teach in any school in France. I'm quite efficient I assure you."

"But your uncle?" again queried the bewildered Timothy. "Why should you want to earn your own living?"

"He's an old beast," the girl answered coolly. "Shortly after you left we had a row. Not my fault. I left him and told him to go to the devil."

Timothy stared at the young, ironical and self-confident face—fair, well-featured, with uplifted chin and grey eyes and mocking mouth, all asserting a disdain of trivial things, and he passed his fingers through his ruffled dark brown hair, as though he were scratching up memories of this serene young woman whom he had met daily at hurried lunch, a few times at tea, and once or twice alone in the garden of the Edgbaston villa. But her amazing words confounded him. He had passed a fortnight with old Joseph Grabbiter, a human Car of Juggernaut, whom he had feared, loathed and admired at the same time.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that you used those literal words to your uncle?"

"Of course I did," said the girl. "There were no other words to use."

"You've got some courage," said Timothy conjuring up the picture of the hard, red-faced old man with his black wig and dyed black eyebrows.

"Lots," she said.

CHAPTER II

SUZANNE CHASTEL having lots of courage and Timothy having none, it was a hopeless affair for the latter. The young woman combined the benevolent authority of a minor goddess with the calm assurance of a highly-bred cat. She just walked into the house, and took up her residence there as a matter of course. At least, so it appeared to Timothy. What could he do? During the one or two strolls round the Edgbaston villa garden he had certainly confided to her his domestic troubles. He had certainly said that the nursemaid Emma must be replaced by a governess. And here was one fallen from Heaven. But she needn't have fallen so abruptly—with such a bang! He liked time to think over things. She had given him none. He had engaged her on the spot—almost on the bang. Naomi summoned on Mademoiselle's orders, had appeared in a wet pinafore and a bad temper, having had words with Emma on the advisability of cleaning up her farmyard with a fully soaked bathroom sponge.

"Better come with me and tell me all about it," said Suzanne Chastel, with her air of authoritative indifference. And Naomi, after a sidelong glance, took the proffered hand and walked off like a lamb. Timothy and Emma stared at each other.

"I'm sorry, Emma," said he, wiping a moist brow, "I don't know how it has happened. But that's Naomi's governess."

"The Lord be praised," said Emma.

So the apple-cheeked Emma, with a month's wages in

her pocket, took rejoicing train to Devonshire, and the reign of Suzanne Chastel began the following day.

Timothy was beset by fears. The governess of his dreams was an elderly, bespectacled spinster. The governess of reality was an attractive, masterful young woman. What could he do with her? What position would she assume in the house? What about meals, evening entertainment? If he had dared he would have asked her to go, and would have advertised for the undangerous and unterrifying ideal. She frightened him. She personified resolution. And then—what about the eternal proprieties? She evidently included them with her uncle in the same consignment.

In her ironical way she solved most of his problems.

"I want to be the perfect governess," she said. "The perfect governess dines by herself in the nursery, and only joins the family at lunch. As you, the family, only lunch at home on Sundays, you'll have to put up with me—for I must see how Naomi behaves herself in company. The family can always come up if it likes for nursery tea. It's the family's right—but it isn't obligatory. The child can be sent for by the family to have tea in the drawing-room."

"I see," said Timothy, greatly relieved. "Thanks very much, Miss Chastel, whatever you arrange is right, I'm sure. But——" he looked suddenly round. "What do you propose to do during the evenings——?"

"The family has nothing to do with the way the governess spends her evenings," replied Suzanne, "except if she comes home with the milk after her evenings out." Then she laughed—the good-humoured laugh of the minor goddess who reads inconsiderable thoughts of men. "Don't be afraid, Mr. Swayne, I'm not going to

be a bit of a nuisance to you. On the contrary——" she threw up her head proudly—"I want to be of service. I think I'll do my duty satisfactorily. If I don't, you have only to send for me and slang me."

"Quite so," said Timothy, shifting from foot to foot on the hearthrug. "Quite so. I could point out little things. But I do hope—I'm sure I shan't have to," he said eagerly, for he knew he was as much capable of slanging her as of cutting her throat.

But what a responsibility! It was a fortnight before he could face Mademoiselle Chastel and Naomi at the Sunday lunch table. By that time, however, Naomi had become the mildest mannered child in London and adored Suzanne, in spite of severities unheard of since early days in Devonshire. Mademoiselle had actually put a stop to the bi-weekly presents. The stocking of farmyards, she explained, was a matter not of divine right but of the grace of God, which allocated to her now and then a dove-cote or a manure-cart as a reward for especial virtue.

During the course of this first meal, at which Timothy sat very shy, as though he had been the child brought down from the nursery, Mademoiselle—for by that title had she instructed Naomi to address her—said calmly:

"Naomi must have some little friends of her own age."

"I've been aware of that," said Timothy, "since the first day she came here."

"Well, we must find them."

Timothy murmured something about being too busy to run about London looking for little friends.

"It would hardly do to advertise," said he.

"If only Phoebe were here," sighed Naomi.

"Phoebe?"

"Don't you know who Phoebe is, daddy?"

"She means her cousin——"

"Oh, yes," said Timothy. "You see they're so many I can't remember their names, and I've so seldom seen their faces. I must really ask my sister to send me a list with their ages. Then I could always run my finger up and down it and easily identify them."

"It would be very good for Naomi to have a companion," said Mademoiselle.

"Oh, daddy, can't you send for Phoebe to live here?" cried Naomi, upsetting the diplomatic apple-cart.

Then Timothy was aware of conspiracy. He frowned, looked from the eager face of the one to the serene, faintly mocking face of the other. Again he felt undone, powerless before this imperious combination.

"I don't know whether Aunt Gertrude would give her up," he said weakly.

But he did know. A vicar's family of eleven children do not live by bread alone, but by butter and boots and beef, all expensive things. There were also the bills for schooling. Gertrude would leap at the suggestion.

"There would be no harm asking," said Mademoiselle.

So Timothy asked, and Gertrude leaped, and before the week was out, Phoebe, coeval with Naomi, was dumped into the house in Montpellier Square.

"You're a dear," wrote Gertrude, "a real dear, especially as you paid us all those years for Naomi. But things are hellish (don't send this letter for publication to the *Parish Magazine*), and Roderick's at his wit's end with anxiety. Only yesterday, he was doing a marriage, and got through a sentence or two before he discovered that the silly ass of a clerk had opened the prayer-book at the Churching of Women. The next thing he'll find

himself baptizing a corpse, poor old chap! . . . but we'll make it up to you somehow, Timothy darling."

It was gratifying to be called Timothy darling by the sister whom he loved—and it was inconceivable for him to receive money for Phoebe; but the addition of another human soul to his household caused his figure-beaten mind intense anxiety.

What could he do, if the children had scarlet-fever and all the furniture—not yet paid for—had to be burned? He must make some provision. He must knock off cigars and expensive seats at Olympia glove-fights, and make a coloured shirt last three days instead of two. Even then his yearly budget would balance ever so little on the right side. If only he had the laughing courage to face the future! If only he could have the joyous thrill of the gambler! But he was a man born to fear—a sensitive creature of infinite timidities.

He had his hour of drugged happiness. The terrifying cook-housekeeper was a woman of integrity, and the house ran on oiled wheels. The housemaid, both cook and Mademoiselle proclaimed a treasure. The creature of brooms and wispy grey hair had reduced her activities to a fine art. From the moment he let himself in with his latch-key the atmosphere of the new home enveloped him in an atmosphere of almost sensuous suavity. He mounted at once to the nursery. The two children welcomed him with boisterous affection, the serene young lady in charge of them with pleasant decorum. They sat round the healthy tea-table, and he listened to the prattle of the day. He could bring little to the conversation, for nothing human or vital had come his way since his departure at nine o'clock in the morning. But he drank

in all their vivid experiences, like a new and intoxicating wine. And then when he left them—and went down to his loneliness, he suffered the reaction of his intoxication. It was all so perfect, so beautiful; but it was a life of enchantment that could not last. An accident, an illness, the weakening of his mental powers, and all this delight would fade like the baseless fabric of a vision.

He also had a fear, he knew not why, of this capable penniless young woman who had unconcernedly told a rich uncle—and old Joseph Grabbiter to boot—to go to the devil. He had in his mind the Briton's vague formula of being master in his own house. But could he ever set up his will against so formidable a personality as that of Mademoiselle Chastel?

After a period of worrying thought he said to her, diffidently:

"My firm has still some minor affairs to settle with your uncle—and I have them in hand. It's rather a delicate position for me. Perhaps I ought to write and tell him you're here."

"I've already done so," she replied. "Would you like to see his answer?"

Timothy held up a protesting hand. "Oh, no—certainly not."

But she marched out of the room and presently returned with a letter in her hand which she held out to him.

"Better read it. It'll show you I've some sense of decency."

He read it. It was in typescript and Joseph Grabbiter had initialled it.

"If a man's fool enough to support a hussy like you, he's welcome. I won't. But how his doing so could possibly interfere with business relations, is an idea that could only come into a female brain maggoty with conceit. J. G."

Timothy was impressed by her forethought. He mumbled thanks. She laughed, taking back the letter.

"Sweet old thing, isn't he?" she said cheerfully, turning at the door.

It was only by degrees, chiefly in the half-hour after tea, when the children, surfeited with food and grown-ups, retired to their mysterious games in a corner of the nursery, that Timothy learned the family history of his governess. For beyond the mere fact that her mother, Joseph Grabbiter's younger sister, long since deceased, had married a French officer of artillery, killed during the last few months of the war, he had known nothing more about her. He had taken her on trust. Suzanne Chastel was the sort of young woman who compelled you to take her on trust. She was as authentic, as far beyond question, as an angel with practical iridescent wings, or a bushy-tailed, fluffy, large-headed blue Persian cat who should enter by your door. But still, whether she be cat or angel, human curiosity is not indifferent to your visitor's antecedents.

After all, when he came to arrange them in his pigeonholed mind, there was very little in them of much interest outside her relations with old Joseph Grabbiter. She had learned English at her mother's knee, had spoken it concurrently with French long before the days of crystallized memory. She had been brought up French fashion, in the various garrison towns where her father had been stationed. Now and then mother and daughter had spent a few weeks in England with her uncle who had quarrelled

with every relative he possessed and only extended his patronage to Madam Chastel out of pity because she had married a Frenchman. He had never left England in his life. He was John Bull incarnate. His ideas of France were those suggested by Gillray and Rowlandson and the rest of the caricaturists of the Napoleonic wars. Now and then he betrayed his secret conviction that they ate frogs cooked whole on skewers. . . . Suzanne had childish memories of the red-faced, thin-haired uncle discoursing:

"Here's your English beef. You can't get it in France. And here's butter, real Devonshire: what would you say to that in Paris? A bathroom, hot and cold water. Now you can get clean at last. Soap. They tell me, if you go to France, you have to take your own soap."

Madam Chastel would laughingly remonstrate. "But, my dear Joseph, we have all these things in France."

"Do you find soap in a French hotel?"

"No—but——"

"There you are! You confess it. I know I'm right. I always am. Don't let us say anything more about it."

He was inconvincible, and to the young Suzanne intolerable. Still, he retained some sort of bearish affection for his sister, and when she died, in 1913, he wrote quite a civil letter to Commandant Chastel and a not untender one to Suzanne, in which, however, he could not avoid leaving the impression of his belief that marriage with a Frenchman had hastened her mother's end. Suzanne laughed through her tears, having a sense of the comic, and destroyed the letter without exhibiting it to uncomprehending eyes. A sister of Commandant Chastel, Tante Mathilde, was summoned to keep house for the widower. She was Anglophobe, devout and ar-

chaically French, so that the semi-English ways of Suzanne, brought up for the past three years in Nice, where her father was stationed, shocked her to the recesses of her prim Angevin soul. Tante Mathilde returned in dudgeon to Anjou. Another sister, a widow, Tante Germaine, took her place, when the war broke out. She was fat and plethoric, and Suzanne calmly took the mastery of the household. But being a young woman of character, she allowed herself to be so far disciplined as to pursue her studies and eventually to gain the *brevet supérieur,* the certificate which gives a woman the right to teach in the State schools and also in an indispuable diploma of education. Socially she made her own way. Various members of an infinite family came to the villa at Nice and sent terrible reports to the now Colonel Chastel exceedingly busy in the Argonne. But Colonel Chastel, Anglophile, knowing his English wife and his half English daughter, sent his family the curtest and most unsatisfactory of replies. *Sacrebleu!* the world had changed since 1870. The hypocritical idea of the lily innocence of the *jeune fille française* had exploded long ago. So long as his daughter was brave and loyal, as he knew she was, nothing else mattered. Between himself and his daughter—and he was perfectly right—there was absolute confidence. But the family, old, narrow and provincial, held up horrified hands at Suzanne's Diana-like independence and pitied her father for his blindness. Couldn't he see that it was an unheard-of thing for a daughter of the house of Chastel to go alone into a hospital and talk with English officers? And when Colonel Chastel replied that a wounded English officer and Suzanne were both of them the salt of the earth and that

they would do each other all the good in the world, they thought the good Colonel was mad, and even contemplated the summoning of a Family Council to arbitrate. But nothing happened, save a great family row, which Colonel Chastel was far too busy, and Suzanne far too amused to worry about. Meanwhile Tante Germaine said sighingly: "Provided you all leave me tranquil, I am perfectly happy."

In October, 1918, General Chastel, adoring and adored of Suzanne, was killed. The vastness of her desolation overwhelmed her. She had loved her humorous English mother, and her death had been a child's deep sorrow. But the heroic father, covered with the glory of many decorations, was to her the Bayard of the war, fearless and reproachless, the pivot of great battles, the demi-god who had come down daily to her level, in his infinite solicitude for the trivial details of her life, and whom with unconscious feminine wile she had moulded to her heart's desire. It was the greatest consolation of her grief that there was no folly in her life, however small or however big, that she withheld from him. On his few leaves they had been inseparable in the holiest communion on earth of lovers. When they walked arm-in-arm down the Promenade des Anglais of Nice, they held their heads up—with a little curious jerk of the chin which alone would proclaim them father and daughter—inordinately proud of each other. And he would say:

"It is not many men on leave who can advertise such a pretty and distinguished *marraine de guerre*."

And she: "You are the handsomest soldier a *marraine de guerre* ever had."

He loved her free independence of thought and action.

He called her once the *fine fleur de l'entente cordiale*—the perfect and exquisite symbol of the great union of the Latin and Anglo-Saxon. . . .

And he was dead, like so many million others. It was only later, when she had to concern herself practically with the winding up of his affairs, that she resumed definite relations with the outside world, and found her financial position ludicrous. She had a pension as the daughter of a regular officer, *un officier de carrière,* which amounted to very little; a few thousand francs in the bank; the furniture of the villa in Mont Boron; and a mass of Russian securities not worth a penny.

The Pont Alexander III in Paris is perhaps the most heart-rendingly pathetic monument in the world's history. Inaugurated in such high hopes, with all the pomp and splendour of the Great Exhibition, it is now a monument to the vanity of even the mightiest of human wishes and the blind ignorance of the wisest of mankind. The foundations of its immense pylons were laid on the future bones of millions of men, its proud span was to cross streams of blood and its gilded emblems were to be a mockery of a world-wide desolation. Yet who could foresee it? Russia was the land of the future, the land of infinite richness. She paid high for money and French capital poured into her corporations and her industries. Thousands who cried "Vive la Russie" in 1900, at the great ceremony of inauguration of the bridge, pass over it now impoverished and curse Russia and all her works, the puppet of an Emperor, the disastrous, neurasthenic Empress, the hedge of ignoble traitors around the court, the foul glamour that hid from Europe the rottenness of the vast Empire.

Colonel Chastel would rail at the *sales bolchevistes,* who

had brought him to financial ruin. But there were many other dirty things which brought the Bolsheviks into power.

Suzanne Chastel, with her ironical survey of mundane phenomena, found railing against destiny a futile procedure, and acceptance of the accomplished fact the true philosophy of life. Her father was dead; she had but a bare pittance to live upon. The family, in spite of the row, came together in council and offered her a home with Tante Mathilde and Tante Germaine in Anjou. She thanked them kindly. She would earn her own living. Had she not her *brevet supérieur?* But a young lady with a *brevet supérieur* is not a rare bird in France. She can't go to the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique and say: "I have my *brevet*. Give me a well-paid mistressship in a school," and expect to be appointed at once. She has to await her turn, even though she may have influence in high quarters. Suzanne was not one to wait. She wrote to her Uncle Joseph Grabbiter, with whom she had always been on corresponding terms—he had sent her five pounds every Christmas for a present—and announced her intention of seeking a position of governess in England. Would he be so kind as to advise her as to the best means of finding such a situation. His reply was brief and characteristic:

"Don't be a silly little fool. Governessing is a dog's life. Come and live here and see if you can get on with me."

Whereupon Suzanne shook from her feet the dust of Nice and of Aunts Mathilde and Germaine and the family, and presented herself at "The Cedars," Edgbaston, the residence of old Joseph Grabbiter.

She arrived in the mourning attire which even she,

independent and rebellious, could not, for social decency's sake, avoid in France; deep black, without a relieving touch of white, and heavy crepe streamers covering and floating behind a plain black straw hat. A multigamous English widow bereaved of all her husbands at once could not be draped in so excessive a garb of woe. Joseph Grabbiter's first greeting when he met her in the hall of "The Cedars" was:

"Good God, my child. You look like a hearse. If you want to live with me, take those damned things off."

And she, taken aback by the black-wigged, black eye-browed apparition—for the last time she had seen him he had been fair and baldish—and furious at his rudeness, flashed out:

"You seem to be in mourning, too. Who for?"

And their eyes met. He said:

"You're an insolent hussy."

"I daresay. But you've no right to insult me. I'm in mourning for my father who died for his country. If you disapprove of me I can easily go back to London. Stop." She held up a checking hand to the footman who was bringing in her dressing bag. "You can take that back to the car."

"You'll take it up to Miss Chastel's room," bawled the old man, very red in the face. He gripped her by the arm: "Come along here," and he dragged her into a morning-room opening off the hall.

"What do you mean by it? You know I hate all these Frenchified ways."

"I'm sorry," said Suzanne, "but I happen to be a Frenchwoman."

He looked at her sourly for a moment. Then he held out his hand.

"I haven't shaken hands with you yet or bidden you welcome. You are, for I was fond of your silly mother. But, as the parrot said when the monkey got into its cage—we're going to have a hell of a time of it."

He pulled out his watch, rang the bell.

"Go and clean yourself up for dinner. I've given you the best rooms in the house. You have twenty minutes. I won't stand waiting for meals. Hungry?"

"Very," said Suzanne.

"All the more reason for hurrying."

To an answering maid, Joseph consigned the care of Suzanne. She was conducted through a house of undreamed of wonder to a suite of rooms—bedroom, sitting-room, bathroom—the last a pink marble palace, with fittings of gleaming silver, all bearing engraved directions for complicated ablutions. She was dazed by the infinity of towels, sponges, loofahs, soaps, silver manicure sets, silver brushes, silver-mounted crystal bowls of bath salts, silver-mounted gymnastic appliances. The bathroom also was far bigger than any room she had inhabited during the course of her life. When she undressed for the bath which the maid had prepared for her, her modesty half shrank from its almost public spaciousness. In her bedroom she found the same wild luxury. She put on the little black evening frock which she had ordered, *à la diable*, from the little Nice dressmaker. Before going down, she peeped into the boudoir, which announced the same luxury.

She was staggered by the evidence of enormous wealth. It was incomprehensible. Her pre-war memories of her uncle's household, were those of the ordinary bourgeois comforts to which she had been accustomed in her

parents' house. It had never occurred to her that her uncle was now a rich man. He had given her no sign or token of his sudden access of wealth. She stood at the top of the velvet pile carpeted staircase leading to the hall, her fingers pressed to her forehead, in deep thought. Then she laughed and went downstairs.

Why Joseph Grabbiter had scoffed at her independent ideas and had invited her to stay with him, she was, during the whole of her visit, at a loss to imagine. He took a Quilp-like pleasure in teasing her to the point of torture.

"I suppose you'd like some friends here, wouldn't you?" he asked one day.

"It would be a change," she replied.

"You'll have to do without it. I haven't any friends. But there are heaps of people who'll come to drink my champagne. Would you like a dinner party?"

"Not for me," said Suzanne.

"Then I'm hanged if I don't give one just to spite you. It'll teach you manners."

He gave her names and addresses for cards and the dinner party took place. He seemed to have cast a malicious net over the most revolting shoal of the dubious finance and commerce of Birmingham. They ate off silver plate, and orchids covered the table. The fat elderly man who took her in called her "my dear," and, pointing to his wife, told her how much he had paid for each of her jewels.

"Charming people, aren't they?" her uncle remarked sardonically after the guests had gone.

"I think they're all loathsome," said Suzanne. "Why did you invite them?"

He turned on her with a flash:

"Because I damned well chose to. It's my house, isn't it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. After all, what did it matter to her? Sometimes, varying the phrasing, he would say:

"You needn't fawn on me or even be polite to me. I'm not going to leave you my money."

"I wouldn't take it if you did."

"Oh, yes you would. A quarter of a million. But you're not going to have any. When I'm dead I'm going to be Joseph Grabbiter of pious memory. I'm going to leave it for a cathedral in Birmingham."

"You haven't been inside a church for years and you don't even believe in God," said Suzanne.

The old man chuckled. "That's the fun of it. You French people have no sense of humour."

One day after dinner, he came to the piano where she was playing some modern music—Stravinsky—and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"What's that beastly stuff all about? It hasn't head or tail—it's tripe. I like something I can understand."

She switched off at once into a ragtime horror. The touch on her shoulders tightened into a vicious grip, his strong fingers sinking into her young flesh, and he cursed her roundly.

"You know damn well what I want?"

She looked up and smiled, and his grasp relaxed.

"I'm sorry," she said. She had gone too far in her revenge, for the old man had a curious spidery love of music. "Will this do?" and she sketched a few bars of Mendelssohn's Spring Song.

"You know it'll do, you little devil," said the old man, going back to his chair.

And that evening she played him all the old things that his mother had played in the sixties—immortal old things, all the same—Bach's Prelude, Mozart's Ninth Mass, Stephen Heller's Nuits Blanches . . . till, when tired she turned on her stool, he rose from his arm-chair and again put his hand on her shoulder, and said in gentler tones than he had ever used before:

"If you only knew what a brainless monkey you are!"

She was touched. She looked up at him, soft eyed, and met eyes also softened.

"Isn't it a case of live and let live?"

"I suppose so, my dear," said he. "Let us leave it at that."

There was peace for some time. Grabbiter, in his bitter way, and yet with a streak of kindness running through it, which Suzanne could not resist, presented her with a cheque and informed her of his wish that she should attire herself in some fashion agreeable to an old man's eye. He also added wryly:

"Perhaps I'll leave you something after all."

"For heaven's sake don't spoil it," she said, indicating the cheque.

It was some weeks after Timothy's departure that the gouty and self-indulgent old gentleman's temper grew abominable beyond tolerance. Suzanne suffered him for a time on account of his infirmities. But at last the final quarrel took place. It arose seemingly out of nothing—just out of an announcement, during the after lunch coffee. The meal had passed amicably.

"I had a letter this morning," said he, "from the only friend I have in the world."

Suzanne asked politely where he lived.

"Everywhere. Perhaps he's the most remarkable man living. Peter Moordius."

"Sounds Dutch," said Suzanne.

"You're devilish clever," said Grabbiter. "He *is* Dutch. At least his name is. His grandfather was an Italian who took Dutch naturalization under the name of Moordius. He married an English woman. Their son became a naturalized Englishman and married a Frenchwoman, and their son is my friend Peter Moordius. So you're not so clever after all," he chuckled. "He hasn't a drop of Dutch blood in his veins."

"And now, I suppose he's a naturalized Frenchman," said Suzanne.

"How do you know that?"

"It's a family that seems to take on the mother's nationality. Are you sure the Italian grandfather's mother wasn't Dutch?"

She thought they were getting on famously. The old man nodded and praised her sagacity. It was a wonder that they hadn't sent for her to take charge of that Infant School, the League of Nations.

"He's coming here next week," said he, "and I'd like you to marry him."

She smiled. "Would you? How old is he?"

"A young fifty."

"And what does he do?"

"Nothing and everything!"

"International Finance?"

"What a brain!" said old Grabbiter, pouring out a glass of liqueur brandy. "Your brain, my fortune; his brain, his fortune. My God—you two would sweep up the earth and leave nothing for the scavengers."

"But suppose Monsieur Moordius doesn't want me?" asked Suzanne lightly. Why not humour the old man?

"Moordius not want a quarter of a million and a pretty girl thrown in as makeweight?"

Suzanne looked suddenly at the hard blue eyes sunk in the great red congested face and overshadowed by the dyed black eyebrows, and for the first time wondered whether the old man was talking seriously. Youth and sex also flamed at the slighting allusion. She tapped her bosom—a Gallic gesture.

"Oh. I'm a makeweight, am I?"

"Do you suppose a man of sense, like Moordius, would marry you, if you hadn't a penny? Do you suppose any man of sense would marry you with your beastly French temper?"

She was about to reply when he banged his great red fist on the table and bawling, compelled her to silence.

"Listen to me. You're a shrew and a cat and a virago and an accursed little French hussy, and you haven't a cent in the world. But you've got brains, your mother's brains, my brains. I'm not long for this world. I may call doctors damned fools, but I believe 'em. You've got it in your hands to become one of the most powerful women on earth. You marry my friend Moordius, and all mine is yours. Settled on you. Don't marry him and you won't have a penny."

Suzanne rose from the table.

"Are you playing the fool, Uncle Joseph, or are you serious?"

He met her calm gaze. "How dare you ask me if I'm playing the fool?"

"It's not the first time you've played it with me."

He pointed to her chair. "You sit down. I'm not

going to have you standing over me. If I weren't tied by the leg I'd get up and box your ears."

Fair play dictated ironical resumption of her seat. The argument went on. At last she rose again instinctively.

"That's your last word, is it? That I should sell myself soul and body to this old—old——" she sought for a word—"this old vulture, just for money?"

"My last word," snarled Joseph Grabbiter.

"Then——" She drew up her tall, slender figure and held out her two clenched fists. "Then——" she gasped for a second, "then, you can go to the devil."

She went out, slamming the door behind her. Old Joseph Grabbiter drank his second liqueur brandy and helped himself to a third. He relit the cigar which had gone out during the discussion, and leant back in his specially constructed invalid chair and pulled ironically at the blue spirals of smoke. And presently he fell asleep, as he always did, every afternoon of his life of luxury. Until four o'clock no one dared disturb him. But at four o'clock, if there had been no summoning bell, his valet had orders to enter unceremoniously.

So at four o'clock, the valet entered.

"Miss Chastel begged me to tell you, sir, that she would not take the liberty of ordering the car, so she rang up a taxi to take her to Birmingham to catch the London train."

"She didn't leave twopence for the price of the telephone call?" snarled old Joseph Grabbiter, wide awake.

"No, sir," replied the astonished valet.

He was wheeling his master out of the dining-room when the old man screwed his head round.

"Jackson."

"Yes, sir."

"That's the worst of 'em. They're never through."

And Jackson had not the foggiest notion of what he meant.

CHAPTER III

AFTER three months, Timothy found himself as remote from his self-appointed governess as on the first day of her arrival. She was just as frank, just as reticent. She sat, with her charges, at the Sunday lunch table and conversed with him politely at nursery tea, and that was all he saw of her. Certainly she redeemed her promise not to be a nuisance. As to efficiency—well—cut the bodies and limbs off Naomi and Phoebe and stick wings under their chins and they might be the originals of the cherubs in the picture. They were almost too good. Naomi could even play a childish game of chess without yawning. She could entertain him with little French songs and recitations. It was a model nursery, just as the farmyard on the deep window-sill was the model farmyard, and Mademoiselle Chastel stood out as the model governess. Timothy grew gradually conscious of her supreme importance in the household. The nursery had become the centre of the living scheme of things in the house in Montpellier Square, exercising a centripetal force on cook, housemaid and charwoman. He himself dwindled to insignificance, until when, letting himself into the house with his latch-key, he felt apologetic to the door-mat for treading on it. It was all very subtle, transcending the guile of the most fraudulent balance sheets; but he felt, without seeking to understand, the dominance of an alien personality. It manifested itself in gossamer ways, little hints of orders, countermandings, predilections. Alone with him, Naomi would refer everything, from great mortal prob-

lems to the consumption of chocolates, to the probable attitude of Mademoiselle. So, in his fancy perhaps did the cook, housemaid and charwoman. He himself began to do the same, and tiptoed up to his bedroom, like a guilty man, on his return from the National Spring Club, because he divined her feminine antipathy to glove-fights. Once she announced her possession of four Sunday tickets for the Zoo, given her by an English officer whom she had nursed in Nice and with whom she had kept up a desultory correspondence. Would he care to come? He assented meekly, although, without knowing why, he resented the officer's impudence. The shadow of a man remote from the Montpellier Square household, chilled him with vague discomfort. He resolved to join the Zoological Society and get Sunday tickets for himself.

They went out into the Fulham Road, the children dancing at her side, each holding a hand. Timothy, limping behind, felt that if she had had a third hand she would have given it to him as well. And at the Zoo, it was she who knew all about the animals and included Timothy in her elementary lecture on their ways and habits.

"I don't like those monkeys always scratching themselves, daddy," said Naomi—they were a few paces away from the others. "What do they do it for?"

"I'm afraid, dear," replied Timothy, "they're full of fleas."

A while later, Suzanne took him aside, and with her serene smile remarked:

"How am I going to get that bit of erroneous information out of Naomi's head? There never was a flea on a monkey since monkeys began. They're only scratching scurf—dandruff."

"Is that so? God bless my soul, I never knew. Well, we must tell her I'm wrong."

"Oh, that would never do," she replied. "You must always be the rightest thing on earth."

He hung his reproved head, and for a long time laboured under the guilty sense of having led Naomi from the path of Eternal Truth, until bunglingly he made confession to Naomi. But all the concern for the Verities that she evinced was to screw up a delicate nose of distaste.

"I'd sooner they were fleas. It's more natural."

And so his mild and timid days went on, until the second catastrophe, dependent, if you will remember, on young Combermere's golf match, and thus, remotely, on the first and original misfortune, came and played the very deuce with his life.

Old Joseph Grabbiter died suddenly of an apoplectic stroke.

Suzanne walked into the dining-room, where he was breakfasting, with the Birmingham solicitor's letter in her hand.

"He died the day before yesterday. The funeral's to-morrow. He was a wicked old man, but I don't like him to go to his grave without one of his kith or kin to follow him. Besides my last words—you remember? I'd like to retract them somehow. If you don't mind——"

"Go by all means, Miss Chastel," said Timothy. "Of course. Of course. Poor old man . . . dear me. . . . It's very sudden."

"Thanks, very much," said Suzanne. "Dorothy"—the housemaid—"will look after the children all right. I've trained her quite nicely. I'll get back as soon as I can."

It was only when he was seated on the top of his city-bound motor-bus that Timothy realized Miss Chastel's calm and prescient manipulation of the housemaid, Dorothy. Somehow he had no doubt of the girl's efficiency. But it was wonderful. While he had thought her engaged in the arts of blacking boots and sweeping rooms and serving his dinner, she was all the time being drilled as Miss Chastel's lieutenant. And lo! when he came home for tea, there was Dorothy smiling and unperturbed, holding the rod of discipline over the cherubic infants. She did not sit at table—she knew her place—but her eye was as keen as her captain's.

"You mustn't wave your spoon, Miss Phoebe, especially when it has been in your cup."

And in Dorothy's amazing tone of command he detected an echo of Suzanne. Truly the latter was a wonderful young woman.

The next morning the blow fell; not that he knew, at the time, that it was a thunderbolt. He was to realize that later. But it was a blow, so sudden as to cause him to take the unprecedented step of telephoning to Combermere Son and Combermere to say that he was not coming that morning to the office.

There lay the letter, typewritten and correct and bald, from a firm of Birmingham solicitors, dear-sirring him and informing him that under the will, a copy of which they enclosed, of their late client, Mr. Joseph Grabbiter, of "The Cedars," Edgbaston, he was appointed co-Executor and Trustee with Monsieur Peter Moordius of 189 bis Rue Boissy d'Anglas, Paris, and that they would be greatly obliged by his acquainting them, per return post, of his consent or otherwise to act in that capacity.

This was upsetting enough; but when he read through

the copy of the will, he drained an empty coffee-cup in hopeless stupefaction.

His stupefaction was almost as great as that of Mr. Pye, senior partner in the said firm of solicitors, when, summoned to "The Cedars," a week or so after Suzanne's high and mighty departure, he was ordered to put into his lawyer gibberish a manuscript thrown across the table by old Joseph Grabbiter. For the old man, who had been wheeled chuckling out of the dining-room by Jackson, continued to chuckle for days in his library until he had achieved an unusual task of composition.

Mr. Pye began to read:

"I, Joseph Grabbiter, of 'The Cedars,' Edgbaston, Birmingham, being of sound mind and soon about to meet my Maker——"

"That's hardly legal——" Mr. Pye objected.

"Not legal for a dead sinner to meet his Maker? Why, you ass, it's done a million times a day." Mr. Grabbiter snarled; the lawyer flushed. The old man went on. "If you don't like my sentiments to stand as they're written, I'll find another lawyer who does. The sentiments are the most beautiful part of the will. All you've got to do is to see that the knots are tied tight enough."

The lawyer hemmed and read through the preamble revoking all former wills and appointing Executors and Trustees.

"Moordius! But surely——" he began.

"Yes. I know. I called him a phantasmagorical scoundrel in my last will—— But—look here, Pye, my friend. Are you going to die or am I?"

"Neither I hope."

"What's the good of your silly hoping? You're going to live till you're green with fungus, while I'm cut off in the flower of my appetite. It's my money and I love Moordius and——" he thumped the arm of his chair and scowled at Mr. Pye, "he's going to be my executor."

Mr. Pye went on. There were a few legacies to servants; a thousand pounds to Mr. Pye, "in the forlorn hope that he will show himself less of a law-stricken idiot when dealing with the execution than he has shown himself in the past——"

"I don't think this can stand——"

"Then the thousand pounds doesn't stand."

"You might have put it more graciously, Mr. Grabbiter."

The old man bent his black eyebrows, and his hard eyes gleamed.

"What would you like me to do, Pye? Kiss you?"

Mr. Pye continued hurriedly and soon came to the sentiments on which his client took such pride.

"I have always intended to provide handsomely for my niece, Suzanne Chastel, daughter of my sister Mary who, with the family self-will, insisted on marrying a Frenchman, whereby she met her death. When the said Suzanne, to all intents and purposes a pauper, came to live with me, I admired her independent spirit, so much like my own that I resolved to make a will leaving her all my fortune unconditionally. But she, being not only the only woman in the world, but the only human being in the world who has dared to flout me and not cared a damn——"

"Surely——?" said Mr. Pye.

"Can you suggest anything stronger?"

Mr. Pye couldn't. He went on.

"—and not care a damn about me, and told me, in set terms to go to hell, my admiration for her has increased a thousandfold. But she is going to be taught humility. She has got to learn that it's not polite to tell rich, affectionate, old gentlemen with a gouty foot in the grave to put the other in and dive to eternal bonfire."

"Is all this necessary?" asked Mr. Pye, an elderly man with a lean flint-hued face on which, as foreshadowed by Mr. Grabbiter, lichens might spread in the course of years.

"It's the essence of the whole thing. Don't you dare change a word of it."

"So," Mr. Pye went on reading, "if she wants her supper of a quarter of a million——"

"But we don't know it's a quarter of a million."

"I do. It's a blessed sight more. But put in 'something in the neighbourhood of,' if you like."

"It's loose—very loose——" Mr. Pye groaned.

"I know. That's why I've called you in—to tighten it up afterwards. Go on."

"If she wants her supper in the neighbourhood of a quarter of a million——" Mr. Pye, a bit of a purist in words shook a resigned head—"she will have to sing for it. She will sing for it for three years, during which she will have to go back to school and learn self-control and manners and the folly of self-conceit. I love the——"

"My dear sir!" protested Mr. Pye.

"Put 'wench.' "

"I love the wench, but she needs chastening. And this is the way I propose to chasten her."

"This is the most extraordinary legal document I have ever had to draw up," said Mr. Pye.

"Good God! man," cried old Grabbiter, "don't you find

it refreshing to have something out of the usual? Were you so mildewed at birth that you've never had any sense of the romantic?"

"I've known you for thirty years, Mr. Grabbiter, and I've never dreamed of associating you with romance," Mr. Pye retorted.

"What paralysing dreams you must have had, Pye," said the old man. "Anyhow that's the end of the cackle. Now we can come to the horses. That's where you come in; to see that they all run round without knocking into one another."

The man of law had his revenge, for it took Timothy the whole morning to translate the legal phraseology merging here and there into incongruous Grabbiteresque, into terms of common speech. And what he made of it was this:

Suzanne Chastel, after the few specific bequests, was sole residuary legatee of a great fortune; but she did not come into enjoyment of it until her twenty-fifth birthday.

He, Timothy Swayne, chosen according to the will "because he is an honest, plodding man without imagination enough to do otherwise than he is told," and a cosmopolitan stranger with a queer name, were appointed joint Executors, Trustees and Guardians until the completion of Suzanne's twenty-fifth year.

For their services Mr. Timothy Swayne and Mr. Peter Moordius were to receive at the rate of £10,000 a year free of income tax from date of death to the determination of their Trust.

Until her twenty-fifth birthday, Suzanne was to pass six months with Mr. Peter Moordius and six months with Mr. Timothy Swayne, who were charged with her maintenance, namely board and lodging, at their own expense,

in the sphere of life in which they happened to find themselves. "They're not bound, unless they are fools——" this was Grabbiter and not Pye—"to give her a stitch of clothing or a bus-fare or a hair-pin."

For all such extraneous expenses, she was to receive £365 per annum from the estate.

There was also a provision that the date of the beginning of this alternating domicile should be one calendar month after his death, and that the first six months should be spent with Peter Moordius.

If at any period, "her infernal temper and cock-sureness"—Grabbiter again—made her an impossible inmate of the house of her guardian for the moment, he was free to turn her out of doors then and there, and she could only seek admittance to the house of the other guardian until the appointed day of her change of residence came round, as one imploring an act of grace which it was in his power to refuse. Yet, when the turn came again for the ejecting guardian to take her into his house, it would be a breach of trust for him to decline to receive her, or for the other to continue to maintain her.

"In order to put a stop to what she might consider a splendid idea—namely, to spend the first formal day every six months with her respective guardian, and by her conduct force him to eject her, and consequently to lead an independent fly-by-night existence"—she should be mulcted of her allowance, in one pound for every day she slept beneath any other roof than of the aforesaid Timothy Swayne or Peter Moordius. On the other hand, in the event of a guardian turning her out of doors, he should forfeit an aliquot part of his fees in respect of the period for which he was responsible for her maintenance.

Until her twenty-fifth birthday Suzanne was not to marry without the written consent of both her guardians.

She was not to marry one of her guardians without the written consent of the other.

On her marriage, with such consent, the trust should end and she should come into possession of her legacy.

If both or one of the Executors, Trustees and Guardians, declined to act, either now or at any time during the period of tutelage, other persons or person should be appointed by the Court of Chancery under the same conditions.

In the event of one dying, the other would become the sole Executor, Trustee and Guardian.

In the event of the death of the survivor, the Trust should be determined and Suzanne should come into her inheritance.

In the event of any contravention of the testamentary dispositions on the part of Suzanne, the whole of the residuary fortune was to go to the State.

Timothy lunched at his club, and spent a distracted afternoon at the office, and an absent-minded tea-hour with the children. The financial aspect of so huge a trust did not dismay him; he could walk through a maze of figures as Fenimore Cooper's Indians could walk through trackless forests. It was the appalling human responsibility from which he shrank. The unknown Moordius haunted him. Had it not been for the small fortune which would be his, for the taking, he would have telegraphed his refusal at once to Mr. Pye. But the twenty or thirty thousand pounds strung up a failing courage. It would solve all his material fears. He could pay for the furniture; he could keep on the modest establishment and put by masses of money for the assurance

of Naomi's future. For the child's sake alone he must undertake the terrifying task—— One aspect of the affair only struck him when he was at tea under the eye of the drill-sergeant Dorothy. Under the terms of the will, Miss Chastel would be leaving him in a month's time to take up her residence with the mysterious Moordius. He would have to get another governess. Somehow the bespectacled austerity of his former dreams did not appeal to him. The nursery, with its toys and deep frieze (ordered by Suzanne) of the animals going into the ark, and its gay voices and young human beauty (including that of Suzanne) had endeared itself to him, unconsciously, as the abode of youth. No grey hairs and sour visages in this refuge for middle age. *Procul adeste profani.* The new governess must be young and pretty and attractive to the children. How to get this rare bird? And when he got her and his six months' guardianship began—what should he, a lame, modest widower do, with two pretty young women in the house, whose mutual animosity even one so unversed as he in the ways of women could not help foreseeing? Absent-mindedly, he set out little crumbs of cake on the table-cloth. Six females—counting the charwoman (he added another crumb), seven. A white and very ugly cat brought by Phœbe from Devonshire and her inseparable companion, sat unconcernedly by the foot of his chair and began to perform her ablutions. He put down a mild, caressing hand. The beast paused, regarded him with frozen contempt, and, tail in the air, marched away. He added another crumb. Eight—against one man. It was hopeless odds.

"Mademoiselle says it's untidy to play with crumbs," Naomi remarked.

"Mademoiselle isn't here, so we're going to have a holiday," he replied, feebly.

Naomi said nothing but looked unutterable reproach. He swept the crumbs into his hand, making amends for dishonourable suggestion, and let them fall tidily into his plate.

"That's better," said Naomi.

Eight females (including the cat) tacitly leagued against him, his own daughter not the least. A year ago, save for his landlady, asexual, in his thoughts, as her duster, his unworried life had been Robinson Crusoe-like remote from this assertion of the feminine. Now he was enmeshed in it up to the chin; up to the ears in which it proclaimed itself with an irony far more scaring than truculent.

By a late train from Birmingham, Suzanne arrived. Hearing the rattle of doors and voices, he went down to meet her and showed her into his little hole of a library. He sat on his writing-chair by the knee-hole table and she threw herself on the couch and began to pull off her gloves.

"Pye says he has written to you."

"He has," said Timothy.

"With a copy of the will. So you know all about it. It seems that I'm to be under the thumb of you and a cosmopolitan adventurer for the next three years. Don't you think it's damnable?"

"I can assure you," said he, "that my thumb will be light."

"Oh—you——" She changed the instinctive note of contempt quickly, seeing the sensitive flush leap into the man's cheeks. "You're decent—you're a gentleman.

Any woman could trust you with untold babies. If I hadn't seen what you were, I shouldn't have come to you. But the other—this Peter Moordius—it's impossible."

She unpinned her hat and threw it on to a straight-backed chair near by, and instinctively gave a few tidying touches to her light brown hair. As she sat defiant, clear eyed, in the insolence of her youth emphasized by the white perfect throat losing itself in the black of the low-cut bodice, which with impatient hands she shook slightly more open, for the first time a whisper faint as the murmur of forest leaves on a windless day reached his ears from some atavistic woodland long, long ago, when a goat-footed god lay idle with pipes to lazy lips; a delicate responsive wonder rippled through his being; scales fell from before his eyes and he saw that she was fair and desirable; and the whisper grew into the misty ghost of a far-off melody instinct with sex.

Suddenly he flushed red, as he disentangled the message from the echo of her last words, and it seemed an effort to steady his voice to a business tone.

"Didn't you say that you quarrelled with your uncle because he wished to force you into a marriage with this gentleman?" She nodded, and he went on: "What I can't understand is—if he was so keen on your marrying him, why didn't he make it a proviso in his will?"

Her shoulders moved impatiently. "Can't you see my uncle was playing cat and mouse with me all the time? I was a fool. I ought to have seen through him. I even believed his story about the cathedral. He was quite cynical enough to build one, anyway. . . . I suppose you've read the will carefully, Mr. Swayne?"

"I've done nothing but think of it all day," said Timothy.

"And don't you think it's the most diabolical document you ever read?"

"It certainly is extraordinary."

"But don't you see each clause is a trap for every base human passion—greed, meanness, jealousy, covetousness? Can't you see him rubbing his hands over the idea of the three of us tearing one another to pieces? Look at that abominable clause about my marrying one or the other of you!"

Timothy reddened again, as the whispered melody again sang in his ear from out of the infinite distance.

"It's an abominable clause," he admitted.

"As though I should ever dream of wanting to marry either of you," she cried indignantly.

"Absurd," said Timothy. "In the meanwhile, what are you going to do?"

"I suppose, if I refuse to touch a penny under such insulting conditions, you would be like Mr. Pye and call me a fool. And yet, if I refuse, the money goes to the Government—for them to provide pensions or sinecures for ex-ministers who can't find any means of livelihood."

"I'm afraid it would only encourage the Government in their extravagance," said Timothy.

"Besides, I'm a Frenchwoman, so why should I give money to the English Government?"

"Why, indeed?"

"He took all that into account, you may be sure," said Suzanne. "Mr. Pye, who is the dullest drabbest old fossil you can imagine, gave me to understand that my uncle spent days and days on this will and regarded it as his life's masterpiece."

"There's one little phrase in it," said Timothy, "which

sticks in my mind. 'I love the wench.' Don't you think it might be sincere?"

She cocked up her chin with a laugh and rose and gathered hat and gloves.

"Good night, Mr. Israelite without guile." She put out a hand. "I'll sleep on it. *La nuit porte conseil.*"

CHAPTER IV

THERE was a miaow of pain, a spit and a scutter as Phoebe's cat dashed through the drawing-room door opened by Timothy.

"A thousand pardons, my dear Mr. Swayne; I'm afraid, in rising, I accidentally trod on the tail of your most excellent cat. It's a queer introduction."

Timothy mumbled something vague and held out his hand to his visitor.

"It's very good of you, Mr. Moordius, to come over from Paris to see me."

"Not at all. Not at all. Unexpected business called me to London today. I crossed by aeroplane, and, as soon as I was free, I took the chance of finding you at home."

"Most kind of you," said Timothy.

"I'm most fortunate," said Mr. Moordius.

Timothy's first impression of him was that of a man of immaculate cleanliness. He glowed like polished faint pink conch-shell, from the top of his perfectly bald head fringed with white at the back to the perfect nails on his clean, somewhat podgy hands. His shaven face, scarcely ruffled by the lines of his fifty years, had the same shell-like pinkiness, in which blue candid eyes were set like deep laughing pools. His features, nose and jaw and chin, although heavy, had preserved a rotund regularity; and they would have been commanding had it not been for a very small, humorous and thin-lipped mouth. The details only occurred to Timothy after the first general sense of the polished immaculate. He was dressed in

grey, even to daintily made grey suède shoes. He wore a great pearl pin in a grey tie. In spite of his thick-set figure, he gave value to the impeccable correctitude of his attire; he and his clothes were one and indissoluble.

"Do sit down," said Timothy.

"Thanks. Of course you know I've come to talk over our poor friend Grabbiter's somewhat remarkable will. May I ask if you've decided to act?"

"I have. And you, Mr. Moordius?"

"I accept the Trust as a sacred duty. We were the most intimate friends for many years—and perhaps I was the only person in the world who really knew the man that lay behind the husk—the man of deep feelings and generosities that he would not confess to himself. And in those he trusted his faith was implicit." He smiled—and his smile was the kindliest Timothy had ever seen on human face. "All the same, he was a remorseless judge of men. So I need not say what pleasure it gives me to make your acquaintance."

His voice was very soft and melodious; his English perfect in phrasing and accent; but still there was something exotic in the suavity of the tone.

"It's kind of you to say so," replied Timothy, with his shy Briton's inelasticity of tongue. "At any rate, I'm a business man—and know the ins and outs of the late Mr. Grabbiter's affairs."

"That's a tremendous advantage," said Mr. Moordius. "If we had had to depend on lawyers, heaven knows when we should have got out of the financial muddle. Now"—he smiled again—"there's no muddle at all."

"Not the slightest," said Timothy, who spoke by the books of Grabbiter & Co. "Only a week before he died

the last payment was made in respect of his interest in the firm."

"You take such a weight off my mind, Mr. Swayne," smiled the other. "One never knows what worrying complications may arise in the administration of a great estate. I'm most fortunate in having such a colleague."

At the back of Timothy's brain occurred the suggestion that he should reciprocate the compliment. But he could not find the adequate phrase. For he too felt greatly relieved by the revelation in the flesh of his unknown co-trustee. He had imagined him a vulgar stick of a man, beady eyed, hook-nosed, hard as nails—a picture evoked by Suzanne's ignorant and contemptuous definition of him as a cosmopolitan financier. When Dorothy had brought up Mr. Peter Mc rdius's card to the nursery, he had stared at it with a sinking of the heart and had passed it to Suzanne. She shrugged calm shoulders. She would go down if he liked and beard the lion in Timothy's den. Whereupon Timothy, vaguely sensitive to a taunt in the air, left the nursery without a word, and instead of meeting the vulgar of his fancy, found himself under the spell of a radiant yet gentle personality. It was he, Timothy, who should deem himself fortunate. And yet he couldn't say so. His head made an awkward little acknowledgment, received graciously by the other who proceeded to the general discussion of business affairs.

"My dear colleague," said he at last, "let me say once and for all that your views are my views, and your wishes, my wishes."

"I appreciate very much what you say," answered Timothy. "But——"

"But——" Moordius smiled and leaned forward in his chair with a hand outstretched. "But—I guess what

you're going to say—there's the lady, the Katherine for whom even Joe Grabbiter was too weak a Petruccio. I know of her—her family history, of course. But of her character I know nothing except through the will. I confess my curiosity is aroused."

"Miss Chastel is a young lady of great character," said Timothy.

"Obviously. Otherwise such a will would not have been made. Besides, you have had an opportunity of judging, as Mr. Pye wrote me that she had been a member of your household for some time."

"She is at home now," said Timothy. "No doubt she would be pleased to see you. I can send up——"

Moordius rose and glanced at his watch. A busy man, he apologized, with yet one more appointment. Would it not be pleasanter if his first meeting with Miss Chastel were of a less formal nature? Would they do him the pleasure of dining with him? Were they engaged for this evening? No? Then would they waive ceremony—the Carlton at eight? Again Timothy of the limited vocabulary said it was very kind of him and accepted on behalf of Miss Chastel.

"At least he seems to have some idea of manners," Suzanne remarked when Timothy went up to the nursery with his report. "It would have been odious to be summoned to an interview like a little charity girl. I don't think I should have been polite."

"He has the most courtly manners," said Timothy.

A few hours later, when their host met them in the lounge of the Carlton, she was bound to admit that had she been a princess, his reception could not have been more courtly. He had the air too of a man that was master of circumstance, knowing the world as a priest

knows his breviary. And, like Timothy, she was impressed by his pinkness of clean perfection. He craved pardon for asking no one to meet her. She must forgive an elderly man's selfishness. If he could have brought his daughter over—but his call to London had been so sudden. There had been no time.

"Oh, you have a daughter?" said Suzanne.

"With whom I hope you'll make the best friends in the world. More than ever now do I regret that my dear wife is no longer alive. Shall we go in to dinner?"

In a flash he had resolved all her doubts, so that she felt guilty of unfledged mis-judgment. Like Timothy, she had conceived him as some horrible financial hawk without human attributes. The announcement of the daughter was a surprise. The tone of the soft voice acquainting her with his widowerhood touched her. It was as though he had put his sorrow, as a homage, at her feet.

They took their places at a table remote from the band; Moordius and the *maître d'hôtel* addressed each other by name. He handed Suzanne the menu of the dinner which he had ordered a couple of hours before.

"If there is anything——" he began.

But she could suggest nothing. "It reads like a poem," she remarked half ironically.

"My libretto to the chef's music," said Moordius, with an acknowledging bow. "Not grand opera, that would be too solemn for the occasion; but what the wise old people of the Second Empire called *opéra bouffe*."

"Meilhac and Offenbach," said Suzanne.

Timothy didn't know what on earth they were talking about.

But only for a moment, here and there, during an

engaging meal, did his perfect host allow him to feel left out in the cold. He always found some tactful means of bringing him into the warmth of an unflagging conversation. He revealed himself a creature of infinite knowledge and catholic tastes. He had ranged the wide world and seen and appreciated all the beauty that the world held. He told little anecdotes with point and charm and hit off bits of description with the truth and vividness of a painter's rapid sketch. And, greatest feat of all, he could talk of gossamer nothing, just as the girl's father, in his lighter moods, could talk; and loving the half-forgotten game, her young gaiety and wit responded, while Timothy, comforted by exquisite food and wine, laughed contentedly, admiring the cleverness of his companions. Now and then they fell into a sentence or two of French which Mr. Moordius spoke with the same purity as he did English; Timothy listened fascinated, and, when they apologized, begged them to continue, for he had not heard French spoken for many years. Also Suzanne, speaking French, recalled to him another and unsuspected woman, with all kinds of little graces and flutterings of eyelids and hands.

When the coffee came, Moordius put four lumps of sugar into his cup.

"My one depraved taste," he explained apologetically. "It would be charming of you to remember that, Mademoiselle Chastel, when you do me the honour of gracing my house."

It was the first reference, since the dinner began, to their future relations. Hitherto he had conducted the conversation with such skill that she had all but forgotten them. She felt the little shock of realization.

"Where is your house, Mr. Moordius, by the way?"

Before replying he drew one puff of the big cigar around which the thin lips tightly pursed almost obliterated the existence of his extraordinarily small mouth so that the cigar seemed to be planted almost monstrously in the full pink face.

"I have a flat in the Avenue Gabriel—the Champs Elysées, you know, in Paris, and a tumble-down château in your part of the world, Miss Chastel, at Frélon."

She shook her head. "Frélon?"

"It's a tiny village in the bosom of the mountains behind Grasse."

"In the will you are described as being of another address in Paris," said Timothy.

"The rue Boissy d'Anglas. Yes. That's where my offices are." He smiled benevolently. "I keep forgetting that you know nothing of me—except that I'm a queer foreigner dumped suddenly into the middle of your lives."

"My uncle gave me your genealogy all right," said Suzanne. "I could draw your family tree this moment. He also gave me to understand you had something to do with finance."

"But he did not go into details?" he asked smoothly, looking at her over his coffee-cup, before he sipped its syrupy contents. "Neither will I," he laughed. "They would be irrelevant and would bore you to tears. I am a banker. And it was in that capacity I met your uncle many years ago, when I began the life-long friendship which has resulted in this charming meeting. Mr. Swayne, your glass is empty. Allow me." He nearly filled the protesting Timothy's glass with old liqueur brandy. "Like milk, my dear sir. It wouldn't hurt a child." He turned to Suzanne. "Yes. Your uncle was

well acquainted with my family history. I wonder if you've got it correct?"

Amused, she ticked off the generations on her fingers. "My uncle said that you hadn't a drop of Dutch blood in you. But I maintain that the mother of your Italian grandfather was Dutch."

"That's quite right," said he. "Hence the name Moordius, her maiden name, which my grandfather took on naturalization. How did you guess that?"

She replied, as she had done to her uncle. "You all seem to have taken your mother's nationality. It was a logical deduction."

Moordius leaned back in his chair and laughed. "We shall have to be on our guard, Mr. Swayne, against this very clever young lady. The merest rattle of wind in the house and she'll be on the track of the skeleton in the cupboard."

Literal Timothy, warmed with wine, exclaimed:

"There's none in mine, I assure you."

"And in yours, Mr. Moordius?" she asked in her clear, almost dispassionate way, so that it was almost a challenge.

He made a playful gesture of uplifted finger and bent brow.

"Did I not tell you of my old château in the Alpes Maritimes? It dates from feudal times, and is a veritable museum of secret things."

"Oh, yes, I know—the blatant kind that clanks. But what about the Avenue Gabriel and the rue Boissy d'Anglas?"

Again he leaned across the arc of the round table and looked at her until she lost herself in the unfathomable blue of his eyes.

"You shall have the master key, my dear ward, to every cupboard in my possession. Can you guess who holds it?"

Somehow compelled, she said: "Your daughter?"

"My daughter Valerie."

She was disarmed, having risen hostile to the implication of being a young woman of over-probing tendencies. It had been but a jest which now the flash of a few words had brought down to something very human.

"How old is she—Valerie?"

"About your age——"

"Tell me about her."

"Aren't you young enough," he asked her, "to enjoy the unexpected? You had no idea, for instance, of what I was like. You doubtless thought of me as an ogre whipping with scorpions where your good uncle lashed with whips."

"How did you guess that?" she asked quickly.

"Ah! the complications of human nature are almost infinite. It's the 'almost' that saves one. We could argue it out on the pragmatic lines of William James. The doctrine of relativity. We have nothing to do with the absolute. We take human phenomena as we find them and deduce our relative laws. And so, with a wide knowledge, my special study, of these phenomena, I deduce your conception of me as the most horrible old man that ever existed. But I'm not. Am I?"

She laughed. "You're the perfect host."

He bowed to the compliment. "Confess then, that the unexpectedness of my appearance in that character has given you a little fillip of pleasure—and a happy life is but a swift succession of such little fillips, just as the perfection of an internal combustion engine, that of an

automobile, depends on the swift succession of tiny explosions. Continuous surprise at all the manifestations of existence is the essential of the perfect life. And as far as I am concerned, I ardently desire that your life should be as perfect as I can make it."

"So your daughter——"

"Still harping—well, well. You see what I'm driving at?"

"From enigma to enigma, the world goes on," she said. "My uncle, you, your daughter. I'm quite content to leave it at that. What do you think, Mr. Swayne?"

"I don't agree with you at all," Timothy replied, pulling back his white tie which a downward glance showed in dangerous proximity with his ear. "I hate puzzles. I like to know exactly what's going to happen day by day, for months in advance. There's no analogy between a man and a motor-car. A man lives by reason and not by explosion of gases."

Even as he spoke, he realized that his life had been such a series of explosions ever since the day at least, when the Devonshire rectory squeezed out Naomi upon him. Nay even before that—from his very fall on the bathroom floor from the hands of the awful nursemaid. Yet there had been periods of calm; the four years at Normanbury over Army pay sheets; also the year or so after demobilization, in his peaceful lodgings in Cambridge Terrace, an ideal unruffled existence. Yes, Naomi's advent began the internal combustion business. Then came old Grabbiter. Then Suzanne. Then the will. Now Moordius. Again Suzanne. He scanned her young, devil-may-care beauty and shot a furtive glance around the crowded restaurant. Not another woman there to touch her. Pretty, fluffy girls there were in

plenty; married women in all stages of ripeness, from the fair-haired, thin-breasted intellectual to the frank, full-bosomed sensualist. He disliked their exiguous yet costly attire, their powder and paint, their diamonds, their pearls. Suzanne, in her plain black frock, cut to the modest limit of exiguity and showing off the pure white of neck and arms, with her light brown hair coiled magically about her proud head—did the room hold such impeccable neatness of coiffure?—with not a jewel save a tiny brooch, a bee in diamonds at the V of her corsage—Suzanne, with her mobile ironical lips, her calm, mocking grey eyes, her air of splendid confidence, reigned in his fancy, the unquestioned queen of the place. Undoubtedly Suzanne recurred as an explosion in his life; and since he was jointly responsible for her guidance and maintenance for the next two or three years, she was likely to continue recurring at a rapid rate.

The other two went on talking. Timothy losing himself in abstract speculations on the new internal combustion theory of existence, which he strove to reconcile with the alarming concrete, went on thinking. For some lack of clarity in his thoughts, the generous wine and brandy may have been responsible. And all the time he looked at Suzanne, with his grave and timid smile.

Moordius aroused him at last from his vague dreams.

"I'm afraid I must mention the word business once more, my dear colleague. When will it be convenient to you to run down to Birmingham?"

The social evening was over. The two men concluded their arrangements in the vestibule while Suzanne sought her cloak. Moordius attended them to the taxi summoned by the commissionaire and bowed a gallant leave-taking over Suzanne's hand.

"I think he's one of the most charming men I've ever met," said Timothy, as they whirled down Pall Mall.

"At present I like my other guardian better," said Suzanne calmly.

"Why?"

"Because you're rather a dear."

Timothy felt as if he had been patted on the head and called "Good dog."

But still he was grateful.

CHAPTER V

ON their journey to Birmingham, Moordius sketched, for Timothy's benefit, the course of his relations with Joseph Grabbiter. They began many years ago, when he, Moordius, young and ardent, had been sent to England by his father to learn business methods. The pursuit of this knowledge took him to Birmingham, where he met both Joseph Grabbiter and Mary Springfield. He could scarcely avoid meeting Grabbiter at Mary's house, because Grabbiter was savagely in love with Mary. With Mary however did Moordius, a pretty fellow in those days and a youth of fashion and fortune, incontinently fall in love; and after a month or two's courtship he snatched her from under Grabbiter's nose, married her and, a young conqueror, carried her overseas.

"But surely," said Timothy, "Grabbiter must have hated you like poison."

"On the contrary he loved me," replied Moordius. "It was in my power to render him great services."

Now here was a point in old Joe Grabbiter's disfavour. Put it in as delicate a way as he could, Moordius could not do otherwise than suggest to Timothy that his rival had resigned his claim to the lady for value received. In fact, the financial transactions that passed between them at the time, were the means of setting Grabbiter, a struggling mechanical engineer, on his feet and enabling him to lay the foundations of his fortune. From lover—and this was a point in his favour—he became the loyal friend of Moordius's wife. On the periodic occasions

when she returned to Birmingham to visit her widowed mother, it was Grabbiter who lavished on her chivalrous and brotherly affection. The pure though hidden rays, said Moordius, of the rough diamond. Loyal to the end —her tragic end—in England, after the birth of their only child. A time of anguish unspeakable. But yet there was consolation in this brotherhood of love. Grabbiter was overwhelmed with grief, so that at the graveside any stranger who saw the tears streaming down both faces would have had difficulty in recognizing which was the husband.

"It is such crises that knit human hearts together," said Moordius. "Our common sorrow was the basis of a life-long affection. I tell you this," he resumed, after a short pause during which the wondering Timothy said nothing, "in order to save your vain conjecture as to the bonds between men apparently so dissimilar, and leading lives so much apart, as Grabbiter and myself. I don't want you to imagine that financial considerations had anything to do with my present trusteeship."

It was only later when they sat down at the library table, with Mr. Pye, the solicitor, that Timothy became aware of the vast interests covered by the word "estate" in the will. He came up against the Midland Citizens' Bank, an institution not mentioned in the accounts of Grabbiter & Co., which he had so assiduously audited. He blushed with shame at having boasted such familiarity with Grabbiter affairs, and caught the echo of an ironical note in Mr. Moordius's late compliments.

Of course he had heard of this popular corporation, a proletarian bank, with branches in many towns in the Midlands and southern counties, which proclaimed itself the small shopkeepers' anchor and the poor man's friend;

but as all the clients of Combermere, Son & Combermere banked with the various haughty joint-stock banks, this deserving institution had otherwise passed unnoticed by Timothy. Now he was in the thick of it. Old Joe Grabbiter was a large shareholder and both he and Moordius were on the board of directors. The Grabbiter fortune was far larger than he had anticipated.

"One of these days it may interest you," said Moordius with the confidential smile of one great financier to another, "to look into the concern. It's worth it, I assure you. Also my Paris house—there's a close connection between the two—but now——"

But now it was a question entirely of the estate of the deceased, and, after a first interview, of affairs outside Mr. Pye's province—the dreary mechanical labour which every executor has to perform. Drawers to be emptied, papers to be sorted, the lifetime of a man, according to the relics he is fool enough to leave behind him, to be judged, and such relics to be preserved in his honour or condemned to merciful annihilation. There were things ugly and things pathetic and things silly. Where they expected order among the papers of so hard-headed and exact a business man, they found chaos. It seemed as though he had malignantly made a salad of them all before his death. Tradesmen's accounts, some receipted, others not, ten, twenty years old, prospectuses of companies that had bubbled with transient iridescence, long ago, racing programs that would have conjured up to the learned the ghosts of sleek quadrupeds scurrying away with many a fool's fortune on their backs, incomplete drafts of wills, masses of War Loan literature, share certificates for trifling sums, letters, innumerable and faded photographs, lay, drawer after drawer, in higgledy-

piggledy confusion. There was a clump of newspaper cuttings concerning chess problems.

"One of the finest players in Europe. My master," said Moordius.

"Why wasn't he known?" asked Timothy, who took a mild interest in the game. Had he not tried to beguile therewith the infant mind of Naomi?

"He was known," replied Moordius, smiling. "Known as the only man summarily expelled from the British Chess Circle, the most exclusive expert club in the world. He was a bad loser and took to kicking tables. And yet he was a most lovable man."

They came eventually on papers relating to this unfortunate expulsion: on others relating to occurrences equally unfortunate. The contents of a mahogany casket revealed a veritable sea of quarrels. Apparently he had devoted it to abusive letters, chiefly from women, which Timothy at once tore up and threw in fragments into the large washing basket by the library table. *De mortuis,* etcetera.

It was a dismal business, which, with an hour or two of Pye, took up all the day till dinner-time. They dined well. Moordius ordered the best champagne in the cellar. Timothy, left to himself, would have cheerfully dined off cold meat and cheese or réchauffés from the servants' hall; a modest back bedroom with a run down a corridor to a general bathroom would have been all his claims. He would not have dreamed of commandeering a palatial suite, the full achievement of the chef, the cream of the cellar and the fine flower of the cigar-cabinet. Shyly he asked:

"I suppose we're following the usual rule in such cases?"

Moordius regarded him with the air of a friend of the universe, beaming pink benevolence.

"My dear fellow," said he. "What a question! Of course we're doing the usual thing. Joe Grabbiter had many faults, but not that of the lack of hospitality. He gave of his best. If we were not served properly here, he would find some means in his spirit-land, wherever that may be, of blasting the butler with a most complicated curse. Alive he could swear effectively; but with the newer wisdom and finer cunning of the dead, his anathema should be devastating."

Timothy laughed, not at any underlying humour in Moordius's remarks, but in response to his colleague's geniality; also in unconscious tribute to a dominating personality. He divined in Moordius an infinite knowledge of the world and stood before him humbly confessing ignorance. The magnitude of the interests with which he was about to deal confused him; whereas Moordius, who had his being in vast spheres of finance regarded the management of the estate as a trivial matter. He conceived the admiration for Moordius which the man who thinks in terms of beer conceives for the man who thinks in terms of champagne. All this was good for him, he reflected; it would widen his views.

As though reacting to his mental processes, Moordius took him kindly in hand, as master does pupil, and disclosed to his wondering eyes far horizons to which they had been blind.

"Romance," said he, continuing a dancing discourse. "What does the word suggest to the brain of the ordinary man?" He paused, rhetorically. "Why, walking down a lane in June with his arm round a girl's waist. Isn't that true?"

Timothy started. Before his own mind the picture had vaguely arisen. "I suppose it is," said he.

"But romance in the wide sense," Moordius went on, "inspires the extraordinary man in every action of his life. Romance is merely the imaginative compelled into form. Romance is the transmuting of castles of dreams into living edifices. It is synonymous with poetry which means 'a making.' Every man has the power to mould his romance out of his dreams. Besides the romance of love, there is the romance of power, the romance of wealth, the romance of business, the romance of benevolence, the romance of revenge. But the man must dream first. There's nothing so fantastic a man can think of that he cannot achieve. The day my life ceases to be a romance, I'll end it," he said, with a snap of white finger and thumb.

Timothy played absently with the stem of his wine-glass, conscious of never having built the smallest little shed out of his dreams. On the contrary, every effort to build had been paralysed by fears.

"I envy you," said he.

The other laughed and sipped his champagne. "Forgive me for bringing in the personal note."

"That's what makes what you say so interesting," replied Timothy. "I wonder what was our friend Grabbiter's romance."

Moordius spread out his hands. "Ah! who knows? He certainly did not mould his life into a thing of beauty, poor chap. Lord! When there's the whole world of loveliness set out for a man's enjoyment, why on earth doesn't he claim to enjoy it? Why be the Man with the Muck-rake?"

And the more Moordius talked, the greater did Timothy

see the resemblance between himself and Bunyan's pitiful figure. Had he not been muck-raking ever since he was born? And had the abominable nurserymaid everything to do with it?"

"Ah, my dear Swayne," said Moordius, at last, rising from the table, "you envy me my romance. I envy you your youth. You oughtn't to waste the precious and evanescent gift in a dull little office in St. Mary Axe."

"What do you mean?" asked Timothy, taken aback.

"A man like you is made to play a bigger part in the world."

Timothy shook his head. "I'm a very humdrum sort of fellow," said he.

"You're not," exclaimed Moordius, with a light like that of a discoverer in his blue eyes, and a smile round his lips. "I see in you more than you know yourself. But we can talk of that later. Let us go to the billiard-room and have a game."

"I'm no good," said Timothy apologetically.

"I'll make you good," laughed Moordius. "Trust to me."

Timothy trusted. Moordius played with the sure magic of the professional. Under his patient and benevolent tuition, the simpler science of the game burst upon Timothy like a revelation. The man had an uncanny gift of creating in him a skill that had never before existed. When, at last, he made an astounding record break of twenty without a fluke which carried him out, Timothy wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Well, I'm damned!" said he.

Moordius laughed. "Didn't I tell you?" And he put up his cue. The man was a wonder. Timothy regarded him more than ever as the Gamaliel at whose feet he was

destined to sit. The old Latin tag came into his mind. Moordius seemed to touch nothing which he did not adorn. Even in sorting old papers, he had an instantaneous masterful way with him. A glance decided preservation or destruction. At the thought of papers, Timothy sighed. He had dined well; he had also passed through an emotional experience. But duty called him. It apparently did not call Moordius, who held out a final hand, and wished him good night. After breakfast they would resume their labours.

Timothy, left alone in the billiard-room, hung about in disconsolate uncertainty. The air seemed bereft of a bright presence. A book or two taken from the shelves failed to distract him. At last, feeling a door-key in his pocket, he switched off the lights and wandered into the library, drawn instinctively to the uncompleted task. When summoned to dinner they had gone half through the dreary contents of an oak chest—engineering pamphlets, newspaper cuttings, faded photographs, seedsmen's catalogues, invitation cards, letters and more letters, faded and dusty, from among which they had picked many written years ago by Madame Chastel, which they had put aside as part of Suzanne's heritage. Soothed by the mechanical work, Timothy finished the sorting of the chest and looked around in search of a new depository. His eye fell on an Empire escritoire in a corner of the great book-lined room remote from the library table. A key selected from the heap that had been locked in old Joe Grabbiter's safe opened the front drawer. It was empty. But lined with satin wood, exquisite and alluring, it invited touch. Timothy, fond of things perfectly ordained, passed his fingers sensuously over the polished surface, and that of the sides, when suddenly a tiny

drawer sprang open disclosing a tiny gilt key. He took it up and stared at it. Clearly it had something to do with the upper portion of the piece which had a smooth front and an ornamental top supported by gilt Corinthian pillars and covering half the table. There was no sign of keyhole. Yet the key meant something. All the keys in old Grabbiter's safe meant something. Stimulated by the evening's talk, Timothy's imagination began to work. He remembered hearing of old pieces of furniture, with secret cabinets, being sold and, coming into alien hands, found to contain documents of high importance. He lifted the escritoire into the middle of the room and began a systematic examination. At last he hit upon the secret.

After all, it was a childish trick, a repetition of that which hid the key. A pressure on one of the squares of inlay which formed the back of the escritoire, released the thin front and laid bare a satin wood key-holed cabinet with folding doors in the half-inch depth of the back. The key fitted, the doors opened and a mass of letters fell out on the desk.

Two hours afterwards Timothy crept guiltily up to bed, carrying with him an amazing secret. Every one of those letters he had burned so scrupulously that not a betraying edge of paper remained in the grate. First he had glanced at them; then skimmed them; then, so as to satisfy his conscience that his original dark surmise was not that of a madman, he had read them through in his methodical, punctilious way.

They were letters written to Joseph Grabbiter by Madame Moordius after her marriage. They were letters of such passion, undreamed of by Timothy, as made his

blood run hot and cold. They proved beyond question that Grabbiter, far from being the loyal friend, was the lover of Moordius's wife. They told the gasping reader that, in the mind of the frenzied woman, Grabbiter was an archangel and Moordius antichrist. They stated in bold terms that Grabbiter was the father of her child. In the last letter:

"Thank God for your words. You have no doubt. If I die I shall die happy. Watch over the child as you have watched over me."

It was stark phantasmagoria. In Timothy's mental world, such things did not happen. They could not happen. And yet the faded ink proclaimed their commonplace happening.

"Watch over the child." That was definite enough.

But, as far as Timothy could make out, Grabbiter had not watched over the child. He had ignored the child in his last will and testament; even in the various drafts dating over a score of years back which Moordius and himself had curiously examined. Why this cynical indifference? If the letters were not genuine, if they had been the outcome of hysteria, he would not have guarded them so jealously. All his other correspondence had been stuffed pell-mell into any receptacle to hand; these letters alone were separate and hidden in the complicated secrecy of the escritoire. All his life they must have meant to him something precious, something dark. Timothy hung on this last word. It connoted a feature in the strange life of the dead man, a life of evil passions, of obscure motives, of grotesque acts. It threw a tragic cloud over a friendship—all the more tragic because the survivor, unaware, had seen nothing but blue sky overhead.

He remembered Moordius's description of the scene by the graveside, the two men broken with grief, the tears streaming down their faces, so that one not knowing could not have distinguished husband from friend. An idyll of David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, Pylades and Orestes, befouled by dishonour lurking unseen in the background. Timothy felt as though he had entered a poisoned garden haunted by an evil presence. Waking dreams interpreted his perturbation of spirit. The old man's wealth lay around in the form of rank leaves and heavy flowers pallid with the death they held; Suzanne and Moordius walked unconscious, while he strove in vain to call them back, for he was stricken with paralysis by the grim shadow of the old man stealthily advancing to blast the unconscious pair.

From which it may be gathered that Timothy passed a distracted night, revolving in his unimaginative mind these problems of unfamiliar destinies; also that he rose unrested, burdened for the first time in his life, with the weight of an intolerable secret. He could scarcely meet the eyes of Moordius who greeted him, fresh as the spring, pink as the dawn, untroubled by any care in the world. They sat down to breakfast, opened their letters.

"From my daughter Valerie," said Moordius. "A lonely life, poor girl. Widowed by the war. If only her dear mother had lived." He sighed. "I do my best."

Timothy tried to murmur something in response and nearly choked over his kidney. Better she were dead. If she had survived, heaven knows what sordid drama would have been enacted; for people, according to Timothy, could not play for a lifetime a comedy of lies. Better far for this good, luminous being to dwell secure in the

memory of his wife's dearness and his friend's loyalty and in the actuality of his daughter's love.

"Here's for the executors," said Moordius, throwing a letter across the table. "Monumental sculptors. They are God's very reputable creatures. I haven't a word to say against them. But how dreadful it must be to belong to a carrion trade."

"We shall have to put up a tombstone," said Timothy, in his practical way.

"Leave it to me, if you will be so good. I'll see that he gets recognition at last." Moordius shook his head. "One of the most misunderstood men that ever lived."

"And you understood him, Mr. Moordius?"

"As far as one man can be an open book to another, so was he to me." He pulled out a gold pencil-case and began to draw and scribble on the back of an envelope. " 'Sacred to the memory of——' " He broke off with a sigh. "Ah! My dear old friend." Then smiling at Timothy. "What a thing is Life. The Mantuan was right. So build ye nests, O birds—I forget the Latin—for others to lay eggs in——"

"Others?" cried Timothy startled.

Moordius waved a hand around. "Suzanne. This pleasure dome."

"Oh," said Timothy. Then gathering together his wits, "I don't think she'll ever live in it."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It's not like her. Besides," added Timothy, with a shiver, "she would always feel her uncle hovering about."

"You are sensitive."

"I never thought so till now," said Timothy. "But

to tell you the truth, I shall be glad to get away from this house as soon as possible."

"You sat up too late last night," laughed Moordius indulgently. "Over-intimacy with a dead man in the early hours of the morning isn't conducive to repose."

How uncannily true, yet how humanly pathetic was this bow shot at a venture. With Timothy's increasing admiration for the man of subtle brain, there mingled now an indignant pity for the man who had been betrayed and fooled for years by his dearest friend.

They had not finished breakfast when Mr. Pye hurried in, with his usual bag of documents.

"There's something," said he, untying a red-tape bound bundle, "which quite escaped my memory. A little codicil of no importance—made on a scrap of paper the day before he died. Here it is duly signed and witnessed: 'I bequeath to my friend Peter Moordius the Empire escritoire with marble pillars, at present standing empty in the north-east corner of the library, as a personal memento.' "

"Thanks," said Moordius. "A charming piece. Why, man, what's the matter?"

Timothy had grown white as the tablecloth. He rose, supporting himself for a moment with both hands.

"Nothing much. Perhaps I did sit up too late. I'll go into the fresh air."

He waved aside offers of assistance and limped through the French windows into the garden and sat down on a damp seat behind some shrubs and put his head between his hands. Had the old man been a devil that he should have done this thing? Or was it the Romance of Vengeance of which Moordius had airily talked last night? A romance nursed and not put into effect until the last

moment when Death had him by the throat? What else could it be? Its cynical intention was so profound. The old man had calculated on a lack of human curiosity. Moordius would bear away to his Paris house and put into a place of honour the casket containing proofs of his dishonour and live with it and love it as a lover of beautiful things. And in the meanwhile he would revere his memory and carry out the will disinheriting the daughter, until some day, when in an idle moment he should be tempted to investigate the secret workings of the toy. Otherwise, why should he have alluded to it as "standing empty"? Verily a devil plotting a Romance of Vengeance.

Presently Timothy said aloud: "Thank God."

He said it fervently, for he believed in God and the Divine Hand that had guided his that night to search the escritoire and so to baffle the schemes of the Evil One. He rose.

"Thank God," said he again. "Now I know what I'm doing."

He knew, or thought he knew, dimly, the course of action prescribed for him by a Higher Power. In every way he must set himself to thwart the many hidden menaces of the sinister being of whose last will and testament he was the chance Executor and Trustee. Just as in the escritoire bequeathed to Moordius lurked destruction, so did misfortune—calculated—for Grabbiter was not a man who forgave insult, but one who was ruthless in crafty vengeance—lurk behind the great fortune inherited by Suzanne. By the grace of God he was the sole possessor of a key undreamed of by his fellow-men. He would devote his life to its proper use.

So Timothy limped back into the dining-room with the

light in his eyes like that in Sir Galahad's after they had beheld the Grail.

"Our friend Pye and I have been talking over things," said Moordius, when, eventually, he found them in the library, "and we think it would be best, if our ward consents, to sell the house and furniture as it stands."

"I'd like to set fire to the place, and burn it to the ground," said Timothy.

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Pye, snapping off his gold rimmed glasses.

"Mr. Swayne has the artistic temperament. I quite agree with him." Moordius laughed. "From our point of view the house is a museum of blatant horrors. There's only one gem in our old friend's collection and that is my Empire escritoire."

CHAPTER VI

AT last the Executors' preliminary task was ended; the immediate debts paid; the staff dismissed; the house and contents, with Suzanne's approval, put into the hands of an auctioneer. Securities as far as possible had been valued, and Mr. Pye empowered to apply for probate of the will. Moordius had also revealed to Timothy the financial relations between Moordius & Co. of Paris and the Midland Citizens' Bank. He showed him confidential balance sheets impeccably accurate in the eyes of the accountant, dazzling their profit balances in the eyes of Timothy, the disciple of Moordius. This was on the last day of Moordius's stay in England. He looked round the mouldy little back office in St. Mary Axe.

"Are you fixed here for the rest of your life?"

"I suppose so," said Timothy.

"Why?"

"What else is there for me to do?"

Moordius tapped his documents. "We want new blood. For a man like you there's a fortune waiting."

"To make fortunes nowadays one must have capital," said Timothy.

"Twenty or thirty thousand pounds. A sound investment. Brains and character, with an official position would do the rest."

Timothy laughed wistfully: "Twenty thousand pounds? You might as well suggest my buying up the Bank of England."

Moordius looked at his watch and rose suddenly.

"Forgive me. My engagements today have to be calculated to seconds. If I'm not over again soon, I'll write to you about my arrangements for our charming ward."

Timothy opened the door. Moordius took his hand, beamed and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Have you never considered the creative force of thought? It's almost automatic. A man lives according to the terms in which he thinks. If he thinks in tens, he lives on tens; if he thinks in hundreds he lives in hundreds. One is just as easy as the other. And it's just as easy to think in thousands. *Au bon entendeur salut!*"

He waved a hand and entered the waiting lift.

Timothy, scripture-bred, reflected on another saying, as he sat at his desk and gazed at the dirty window-panes through which the spring sunshine entered as November fog: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" He shook his head sadly and went on with his work of checking the accounts of a pickle manufacturing company whose yearly balance sheet was shortly due. Yet when he went home and had finished with Naomi and Phoebe and Suzanne and dinner, and had taken down a bound volume of Bell's "Life in London"—an almost complete set being one of his most precious possessions—wherein to find distraction in the account of some fisticuff battle long ago, the rococo tale failed in its accustomed charm; the print of the long close columns grew dim before his eyes; he saw Moordius's winning smile and heard his persuasive voice—Romance. The Man with the Muck-rake. Thought is creative. It can create twenty thousand pounds if one thinks in terms of thousands. . . . But if thousands, why not millions?

"That way madness lies," said Timothy, rising and putting the heavy volume back on the shelf.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, refilled and lit it and brooded before a dying fire. Millions? Why not? The Rothschilds and the Vanderbilts and the Pierpont Morgans were all sane folk. It was only a question of establishing in one's mind a unit of value. What differentiated him in financial conception from the man who sold newspapers at the corner of the street? This: that the man's unit of value was a penny; to him, Timothy, a penny was valueless; his own limit was at least a shilling —he would set it, conscientiously, as low as he could. Therefore, in financial conception he was twelve times the superior of the newspaper man. Now, the unit of young Combermere, the airy autumn leaf, he felt certain was a pound. He concerned himself no more with shillings than Timothy did with pence. Hence, in financial conception, Combermere was two hundred and forty times the superior of the newspaper man and twenty times that of himself. Moordius, who threw away Treasury notes like waste paper, could have no unit of value less than ten pounds. The multi-millionaire's unit would be, say, a hundred. So in the scale of values of five individuals you had this remarkable mathematical progression from the man whose unit of value was a penny:

1. 12. 240. 2400. 24,000.

Timothy sucked at his pipe and lost himself for a while in a metaphysical fog. Nothing was absolute. These were but mental conceptions. Yet—let him get clear. If the newspaper man could rid his mind of his penny unit and establish the shilling, he would naturally assert himself on the shilling and not on the penny scale. In all probability his claim would be successful. The fog began to lift. Why shouldn't he raise his unit from a shilling to a pound? Then he floundered again in the dark-

ness, until a glimmer of light recurred; and so he smoked on, emptying and refilling his pipe, his mind passing through alternate phases of gloom and luminosity, yet all the time guided by the will-o'-the-wisp of a man's blue eyes from which beamed the wisdom of the world. Why should his unit of value be a pound? Why not ten pounds? Why not a hundred?

He rose and stretched himself. Twenty thousand pounds? What was twenty thousand pounds? With his investments his interest in Combermere, Son & Combermere, and his Trustee's honorarium, he could raise twenty thousand pounds tomorrow. You only had to think in terms of thousands, said he, egregiously fallacious, and there you were, with the thousands lying in the palm of your hand. Allah was great and Moordius was his prophet.

He stumbled to bed and passed a restless night. In the cold dawn Fear gripped him and held him in recurrent nightmare till he rose. No. He could not raise his unit conscientiously above half a crown. The twenty thousand pounds was not his but Naomi's and Suzanne's. While shaving he decided to order a new dress suit so as to be more adequately fitted to move with Suzanne in the gayer circles of London.

At the corner of the street, on his way to the motor-bus, he bought as usual a newspaper to read on the journey—a newspaper which he would not think of admitting to a house regularly supplied with the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail*. This surreptitious reading of a Radical print was the one adventure of the day—a sort of spying into the enemy's camp. It always cheered him to be assured of the hopelessness of their position. Having by chance a threepenny bit he pressed it into the cold soft palm of

tne newsvendor and waved away the offer of change. He would try his half-crown standard. He spent his morning in the routine of the office. Towards lunch-time young Combermere, light, spruce and brown, blew in to announce entertainment of friends at the Savoy. Would Timothy stave off any damn bores who might want to see him? And then, without waiting for a reply:

"Why don't you go West sometimes and have a christian meal, you old fossil? It would do you all the good in the world. So long." He laughed and blew out of the room.

At five minutes to one exactly Timothy reached for his hat—no one ever runs about the City with gloves and stick—and at one o'clock precisely he entered the "George and Vulture" and ordered his chop, fried potatoes and small bottle of Bass, as he did every working day of his life. He sat, in his usual seat opposite a man who had sat in that seat and ate chop and potatoes and drank a small bottle of Bass every day of *his* life. The small, low-ceilinged room was crowded with men who came there at the same hour to eat the same food year in and year out every day of *their* lives. The men who wore their hats, always wore their hats; the men who ate bare-headed, always ate bare-headed. Timothy belonged to the latter category; so did his commensal, whose name, occupation, or manner of speech he knew not.

Doubtless the old place has its charm. It has scarcely altered since Dickens' early days. Some of the old boxes still remain. So does the fireplace, with its grill, within reach of every hungry eye, on which a white-haired chef, as he had done for years immemorial, turns over confused scores of sizzling chops and steaks with unerring judgment. The place has character. The competing res-

taurants of the world could not produce chops and steaks in juicier perfection. But its frequenters seem to think little of such things; just as it does not occur to them to deplore the good (or beastly) old English non-supply of table-napkins. Like automata they flock thither (as to a hundred other City eating-houses) every day from their perky youth to their anxious middle age, sit in the same seat and swallow the same food. The waiting-maids seldom ask what they will have, serving steaks to the steak-eaters and chops to the chop-eaters. They never linger over their meal, but finish it within a fraction of a second of the accustomed time, pay the same bill that never varies by a penny and rush down the narrow court into the engulfing City streets.

On this day, however, no sooner had Timothy given his order than a spirit of revolt awoke in his soul. A pleasant tingle ran through his veins. He recalled the waitress.

"No. I'll have some cold chicken and ham," he said desperately.

The perspiring girl, incredulous, edged her way towards him between the serried ranks of chair-backs. His chop-eating opposite neighbour stared at him open-mouthed and absently helped himself to mustard.

"Chicken and ham, sir? Your chop's on the grill, sir. It was put on as soon as you come into the room."

The spirit of revolt burst into a delicious flame. This was nothing less than tyranny.

"Then take it off and give it to some one else. I'll have chicken and ham and—yes—and a salad. And you might bring me a pint of Graves."

He smiled on her so as to relieve the asperity of his words, and she went and conferred anxiously with the

manager who cast over Timothy a diagnostic eye. Of course every City eating-house is liable to the incursion of outlanders of fantastic tastes for which it has to cater. There was a browned chicken, a pink ham and fresh lettuce in water—which last, eaten wet, the pampered and luxurious found appetizing with their cheese. Timothy did not ask for the impossible; but as a chop-eater of years' standing he had asked for the improbable. So table-mate, waitress and manager feared for his reason.

He enjoyed his meal conscious of an almost schoolboy freakishness, and lighting a cigarette, a thing he had never done before at that table, he began to consider why he had submitted to the grim law of grilled chop which, though invariable in its succulence, was yet abominable by its monotony. He paid the unwonted bill with an air of exhilaration, and strode rather than limped out of the place, a free man. It was a moist spring day, with slants of sunshine hard as heraldic quarterings across great buildings, with cool deep shadows, with here and there, in a sudden vista, a white spire dreaming in the London haze. In front of the Royal Exchange they were selling violets. He bought a bunch and stuck it in his buttonhole.

Habit guided his steps to his accustomed underground café, a great saloon crowded with men round little tables, drinking coffee, smoking and playing dominoes. His accustomed waitress smiled at him, ran to set the tilted chair which reserved the place at his accustomed table and sped away to fetch his accustomed coffee. At the next table playing dominoes sat two men who came there and played every day of their lives, to whom he had never spoken, who remained after his arrival twenty-five minutes by the clock, and in whose game, he, solitary,

had taken a daily interest. Today he looked round the thronged, smoke-filled room with a new vision. The same men, at the same tables, doing the same thing, day after day, year after year, for the same clock-measured length of time. They were of all classes in the queer City democracy, from young clerks in mercantile houses to august members of the Stock Exchange. All had bolted their accustomed meal at their various eating-houses—there is not an establishment in the City of London, that in ordinary reason, can be called a restaurant—and had rushed thither to spend the calculated minutes that remained of their daily hour's freedom in the uninspiring austerity of this crowded cellar.

The waitress brought the fluid which in the City of London goes by the name of coffee. He drank off the tepid bitterness at a gulp and made his way to the pay desk, and, after settling his bill, mounted once more into the sweet upper air. He had twenty minutes left of his luncheon hour, an unprecedented span of leisure. He experienced a sudden bird sense of irresponsibility. The soft air and the sunshine and the blue mist were his for twenty minutes. He wandered, jostled, along the pavements, and began to picture a scene of trees and green grass where he could have and hold these transient possessions. Romance. The word dropped into the quiet pool of his mind and made ever widening circles. Again a thrill ran through his veins. By what law of God or man were those twenty minutes ordained? He was not a clerk but a principal. He had as much right as young Combermere to extend his luncheon hour. His nostrils caught the odour of the violets in his buttonhole. Romance. Moordius's word again. It meant not dreams but the human will moulding dreams into Life.

"By God I'll do it," said Timothy.

He mounted, Knight of Wild Adventure, to the office in St. Mary Axe. To the Commissionaire he flung the announcement.

"I'm going out and shan't be back till tomorrow morning."

In his dare-devil mood he rang up Suzanne.

"I'd like to take the children to Hampton Court. . . . Yes, I'm taking the afternoon off—yes. Sunshine—flowers. . . . Will you come too? . . . Delightful. I'll jump into a taxi and come straight down."

Suzanne entered the nursery and proclaimed the glad tidings.

The first transports over, Naomi asked:

"But how can Daddy get away from the office on a Tuesday?"

"He must have gone deliciously mad," said Suzanne.

Although Timothy, from this memorable afternoon, entered and quitted the offices of Combermere, Son & Combermere with a new sense of enfranchisement, to say nothing of a certain don't-care-a-damn-ishness which perplexed the gay young Adonis of forty who was his partner, and although Moordius sleek and pink, in the course of a couple of swoops on London, held out to him the fantastic possibilities that might ensue on his thinking in thousands, his ingrained timidity enchained him to his accustomed conditions of life. With accountancy in all its branches he was familiar. It was the work which suited his temperament. The less imagination exerted to make two complicated sets of figures balance, obviously the better. The processes employed were as exact and as far devoid of human equation as those of the late Mr.

Babbage's calculating machine. But the mental equipment required of an international banker was vastly different. The banker's romance was to dream of millions and by some subtle act of will to make the dreams come true. It wasn't as easy as realizing dreams of budding leaves and grass and spring flowers. Any fool could shout down a telephone and hail a taxi-cab.

Besides, during this month's interregnum—a theoretical one, it is true, owing to the ironical Suzanne's impeccable behaviour—Timothy was greatly worried over domestic problems. What would become of Naomi and Phoebe when Suzanne departed on her first half-year sojourn with Moordius? Sergeant Dorothy, an excellent temporary officer, could not take over supreme command. There were threats of mutiny if another chief should be appointed. And day followed day, and the immutable date grew nearer, and nothing was done.

Then, one evening, Suzanne sailed serene into the library, where Timothy, surrounded by reference books, was solving an acrostic in a Sunday paper—he had taken to this pastime of late as an anodyne from cares—and said:

"I think I've solved the question."

"What?" said he, turning on his swivel chair. "A . . . I. 'Oh, for a flavour of the South, Olives, Provence and laughing mouth.' What can it be?"

She laughed. "Something to do with garlic. Oh, I know. A . . . I. aioli. It's the national sauce of Provence—mayonnaise made with pounded garlic."

"How do you spell it? Ever so many thanks." He wrote it down. Then he looked up. "How did you know what I was puzzling over?"

"I didn't. I came to tell you I've found a governess

for the children. Of course subject to your approval."

"Good gracious," cried Timothy. "How on earth did you manage it?"

"I found praying to the winds to blow us one was no good——"

"Not a bit," Timothy acquiesced. "I was just think- of giving that up myself."

"So I've been round to the agencies and interviewed about forty and all impossibles. The forty-first is here now."

"Where? In the house?"

He leaned forward, gripping the arm of his chair. Had Suzanne announced the visit of a professional poisoner his air could not have been more perturbed. Suzanne smiled indulgently. She had grown to love, in a protective fashion, this new guardian of hers, much less determinate and capable of self-protection than Naomi.

"Don't be alarmed. She's all apples and roses and diplomas and references and prepared to look on you as an ogre. Her name's Angela Messiter. She was getting on splendidly with the Marchioness of Mounthaven's little daughter when the Powers above were bolshevist enough to carry her off with scarlet fever. Miss Messiter is now disinfected and out of a job. And she's fresh in the market. Terms arranged. Same as mine. She knows all about everything here. Shall I send for her?"

"If you would be so kind," said Timothy politely, rising from his chair and limping towards the bell.

But, in her incomparable way that was neither languid nor swift, she reached the bell before him.

"You've got to be an ogre, or all is lost. She's that sort. You've heard of Lord Mounthaven?"

Timothy scratched a ruffled head, stimulating reminiscences of a peer notorious for evil living.

"Oh, yes," he said at last. "A dreadful fellow. An awful brute."

"She adores him. That's why I tell you to be an ogre from the start and you'll have the whip hand over her for ever afterwards."

Dorothy opened the door, ushering in Miss Angela Messiter. She was small. She had a russet apple complexion with a flush of real rose in her cheeks. She had timid dark eyes. She wore a little fur toque, and a brown stuff coat with an edging of fur, buttoned up to her chin. She was provocative May masquerading as October. Timothy rose from his chair. She looked at Timothy. Timothy looked at her. Suzanne fair, slender, ironical, regarded them both.

Timothy put out his hand.

"It's awfully kind of you, Miss Messiter, to undertake the charge of my little girl and her cousin." He glanced at Suzanne. "I know I'm a very difficult person to deal with. Vile temper you know and that sort of thing, as Miss Chastel has doubtless told you. But if you'll overlook that, I'm sure you'll be as comfortable as I can make you. Yes—quite comfortable. At least I hope so." He turned to Suzanne. "You know, Miss Chastel, better than I do."

"I've spoken quite frankly to Miss Messiter," said Suzanne.

"Well, in that case——" said Timothy.

"I understand you would want me to take over on the twenty-third," said Miss Messiter in a voice low, well modulated like that of a bird which sings for its own enjoyment and not for effect.

"The twenty-third. Yes. Quite so," said Timothy. "If you're free then. . . . By the way, my little girls are very fond of animals. Miss Chastel has almost brought them up at the Zoological Gardens. At present they've got two cages with about forty white mice. Of course, if you object to white mice——"

Miss Messiter smiled, showing white even teeth.

"I love them."

"Then——" said Timothy. He smiled too and held out his hand—"Till the twenty-third."

He held the door open and was for showing her out of the house, but Suzanne checked him. She must have a little talk with Miss Messiter. Timothy left alone returned to the next light of his acrostic. Thank God the governess question was settled. Suzanne was a wonder. T——B. He concentrated his intellect on the light.

"Ask not why
In hero's eye."

"By George! I've got it. Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman. T O B — Y."

Suzanne entered and put the tips of her fingers on his shoulder.

"She'll be quite all right. But you——"

He looked up at her.

"You're the most inefficient ogre I shall ever meet in the whole course of my life."

CHAPTER VII

PARIS clothed in the lilac of spring greeted Suzanne. Her heart leaped at the sight and the smell and the sound of it. The great open car swung down the rue Royale into the Place de la Concorde, mild and vast in the May twilight. As the statues of the cities flashed upon her, she felt a great lump in her throat.

"I have only seen this once, when I was a little girl, and my father showed me the mourning wreaths and told me what they were for. And now there is no more mourning and the cities are ours for ever. If only my father could have lived to see them."

"It is that you and France should see them as they are that your father willingly gave his life," said Moordius.

She grasped his arm. "It's wonderful how you understand."

"Ma chère enfant," said he, "who could live in France without understanding?"

"Quite so," said Suzanne. "But there's understanding with the head and understanding with the heart—two totally different things."

The journey had done much to reform a somewhat impatient impression of her French guardian. She was touched, in the first place, by his practical courtesy. He had arrived in London the evening before, for no other purpose than to escort her back with him to Paris. She had found herself in the hands of a solicitous adept in travel. All the wearisome pushing and struggling and carrying and waiting and comfortless sitting of her journey to London had no counterpart in this serene and ex-

quisitely ordered transference. The pink, white haired smiling man by her side had waved a delicately gloved hand, and railway stations and ships and custom houses seemed to do his bidding. The very sea had lain obsequiously calm.

He impressed her with his power of guiding her over equally unruffled waters of existence; into a new life, not merely of bodily ease and luxury, but of spiritual content; into a highly cultivated Lotus garden of which he was the accomplished proprietor.

"Your happiness, my dear ward," he had said, "shall be my sole concern. I am hoping to have the privilege of anticipating your wishes; but if you have a wish that I may not have divined, you have but to express it and at once it shall be gratified."

What could exquisite politeness say more? And what could two-and-twenty, no matter how independent, do less than smile in responsive acknowledgment? He had the marvellous gift of understanding; and, as she said, of understanding with the heart.

At her little speech he bowed and touched his breast.

"I hope to deserve your tribute."

Thus, when the car rolled up in front of a great doorway in the Avenue Gabriel, they were the fastest of friends. She suddenly laughed, with not untender reminiscence, at the vision of her incongruous co-trustee, the inconclusive Timothy, all his functions of escort usurped from the moment of arrival at Victoria, limping by the side of the moving train and, with desperate unsuccess, throwing at the Pullman window a book obviously bought for her, left forgotten in his pocket and too late remembered. Poor dear old Timothy! Fancy Moordius forgetting. Had he not stopped the car at a florist's in the

Place de la Madeleine and brought out a vast paper cone filled with daffodils? And said: "The first evening we met you said you loved them beyond all flowers."

The chauffeur lifted off the rugs. A man in livery emerging from the doorway took handbags. Moordius conducted her through a tessellated hall to the lift.

"I have but a modest nest, two inconsiderable flats thrown into one," said he as they mounted; "but possibly three birds may live in it without over-crowding."

A footman admitted them into a spacious vestibule filled with statuary, pictures and old furniture, and Moordius threw open the door of the drawing-room. The curtains had been drawn and the shaded lamps lit. A girl put aside a novel which she had been reading, rose slowly from her chair and advanced to meet them. Moordius with a spacious gesture took her in his arms and kissed her on the forehead.

"My dear Valerie." He held her, hands on shoulders at arms' length. "You're not looking yourself. Headache?" She nodded listlessly. "I thought as much when I didn't see you at the Gare du Nord to welcome our guest. Mademoiselle Chastel, this is my daughter, Mrs. Doon."

"Mademoiselle, I am enchanted to see you," said Valerie, and proferred a languid hand. "I hope you have had a good journey. Pray sit down."

Suzanne glanced swiftly from father to daughter, puzzled by the amazing contrast. He, fresh-coloured, blue-eyed, alert, dominating, youthful in spite of his pink baldness and white fringe of hair; she, dark, thin, unresponsive, almost negative. Suzanne wondered what she would be like divested of the sole attribute that gave her some sort of character, a purple kimona with, here and there,

a dragon embroidered in gold. Her eyes like her hair were black and lacked lustre; her features regular; her cheeks pinched; her lips pale. "Pump some sort of passion into her," thought Suzanne, "and she might be beautiful. At present she seems to be living about thirty degrees below zero, which is, in itself, disfiguring. Also the way she does her hair is the correct thing for Madonnas, but isn't attractive in young widows."

"My father is an experienced traveller," said Valerie Doon, in a dull, flat voice, when Suzanne had sketched the amenities of the journey. "He knows all the tricks of the trade, as we say in English—" She broke off, for the sake of the phrase, from the French in which they were speaking—"he's never happy unless he's moving about."

"And Valerie's never happy," said Moordius, "unless she's in a state of—kimono. My dear Suzanne, if you'll allow me to address you by a name more intimate than Mademoiselle my ward—and I implore you two to be Suzanne and Valerie to each other from this moment—my dear Suzanne, if you can induce my daughter to prefer, as you do, the state of movement to the state of kimono, you'll be performing an act of the highest altruism. I hope at least, my dear——" he smiled at Valerie —"you've ordered us a good dinner."

She began to reel off in an uninterested way:

"Consommé madrilene, Truites au bleu, Carré 'd'agneau. . . ."

He broke in:

"A dinner for one who has crossed the Channel. You think of everything, my dear Valerie."

Although he smiled benevolently, Suzanne wondered

whether she was right in noting a touch of acidity in his sweet voice.

"It was François."

He turned to Suzanne. "The chef. A well meaning but limited being. Doubtless he will satisfy the hunger from which I'm sure you must be suffering. Will you show Suzanne to her room, my dearest, or shall I ring for Annette?"

Valerie rose. "Will you be kind enough to follow me, Mademoiselle?"

Moordius sprang to the door, and smiled paternal affection on them as they passed out.

Valerie conducted Suzanne to a miniature suite, boudoir, bedroom and bathroom that had been apportioned to her. The same luxury was hers as at the Edgbaston villa; but it was the luxury conceived by a man of faultless taste. After showing her round, Valerie pressed a bell.

"I am ringing for Annette who will prepare your bath and get your things out for you. Doubtless your heavy luggage will arrive from the Gare du Nord in a few moments. We dine at eight."

She retired, dark, unsmiling, automatic.

Suzanne's lips curled ironically at her attitude. What ailed the woman that she should accord so grudging a welcome? Jealousy? She shrugged her shoulders. A life broken by early widowhood? A kinder solution. Moordius had sketched the poor little tragedy. There had been a Colonel Doon, commanding a battalion of Territorials, a stockbroker by peace profession and an old acquaintance, who, finding himself in Paris in the early days of the war had suddenly fallen in love with the eighteen-year-old Valerie and demanded her hand in

marriage. Although he was twenty-five years her senior, Valerie loved him. An idyll of the war, said Moordius. Besides, he was a man of means. There was no reason for Moordius to withhold his consent. They were married. A fortnight's honeymoon and he was ordered with his regiment to Salonica where he forthwith died of dysentery. And after his death, when Moordius came to look into his affairs, it was found that he was practically bankrupt.

"Which is the most unimportant thing in the world," Moordius had said with a gesture of his white hands, "for whose else but hers, can be what modest fortune I possess?"

Well, that was Valerie's story. She had been a widow for some years, time enough, thought Suzanne, to soften the first poignancy of bereavement. Like every one else she had met war widows who had been swept through the depths of anguish, who still mourned inconsolable; but yet who realized that the perpetual parade of woe is an offence against a community of mortals whose food unless it perisheth must be hope instead of despair; who smiled, even laughed, on occasion; who at any rate conformed to the rules of courteous observance. Suzanne lay in her sweet-smelling hot bath. In Montpellier Square she had not given a thought to bath salts. Certainly Timothy had never heard of them. Also they had not been essentials of her old life in France. But they were good all the same, impregnating the air with a stimulating sense of luxury. And, as she lay, she thought idly of Valerie; and the more she thought the less was she convinced that Valerie could be stricken to the soul by the tragedy of her widowhood.

At dinner, a perfect meal, served on a table set with

old silver and rare glass, Valerie maintained her air of languid aloofness. She spoke little and ate less. Moordius involved both young women in the same urbane solicitude. He spoke with boyish zest of the wonders of Paris in May: the pictures; the new pieces at the theatres; the opera; the dancing of the mad post-war world; the sparkling talk of Paris, ever Athenian, ever seeking something new. For a month ahead he sketched a program which should enable Suzanne to set her foot on the paths which all Paris delighted to tread. The strong sap of youth worked deliciously in Suzanne's veins. She lost her head a little in the dear French talk, so effervescing, so dancing, so unlike the solid cutting English to which she had been accustomed for the past year.

He told a story, droll and witty. Suzanne's laughter rippled forth spontaneously; but catching sight of the meagre face of Valerie, with eyes impassively downcast, she checked herself and her gaiety went from her as though nipped by a cold wind. She glanced at Moordius. His blue eyes still held the smile of the man who tells a story with success. He read her question.

"You mustn't mind Valerie," he said in an indulgent undertone. "She lives on a plane above all my frivolities."

"What are you saying?" asked Valerie, raising cold eyes.

"I was explaining the point of my little story to Suzanne, *mon enfant,*" he replied.

"It was quite clear. I should not have thought that Mademoiselle Suzanne needed explanation."

"Then why didn't you laugh?" cried Suzanne.

"Let us say that it is too fatiguing."

"On the contrary laughter is the most restful thing in

the world," said Suzanne. "Don't you ever laugh?"

"Ah, yes. I laugh sometimes," said Valerie.

"There is laughter and laughter," said Moordius, leaning back in his chair and joining his plump white finger tips. "I think it depends on the kind of laughter with which the high gods salute the birth of a human being. A fantastic theory, I grant you, but it explains the variations of the sense of humour in us mortals. There are people who could sit unmoved before "Charley's Aunt" or "La Dame de chez Maxim's"—I'm afraid I'm quoting classics—and see nothing to laugh at, but who would be tickled to death if they beheld their father suddenly devoured by worms, like Herod in the tradition. He might die of apoplexy or measles and they would take it as a matter of course. But worms, myriads of white crawling worms—the comic spirit would descend on their shoulders and twist them up in convulsions of uncontrollable mirth."

Suzanne laughed. "I think it's disgusting—not your theory but your example."

"But it's true. Isn't it, Valerie?"

She raised her shoulders slightly. "I refer you to Monsieur Bergson and his book on the philosophy of laughter."

"How charming it is to have a blue-stocking in the house. Have you read Bergson?"

"Unfortunately no," said Suzanne.

"Nor I, either," smiled Moordius. "But——" he paused before a dish of fruit handed him by the footman —"here are peaches. Peaches in May—more precious than all the philosophy of all the philosophers. Where did you find them, my dear Valerie?"

"In a shop," said Valerie.

The cold rudeness of the reply angered Suzanne, and a spot of indignant red glowed for a few moments on her cheek. A detestable woman! Her heart went out to the patient father, who made no reply, but delicately peeled his peach.

"My father so seldom honours us with his presence at dinner that he finds it difficult to believe I can give him decent food."

Suzanne restrained with some difficulty an obvious tart retort. Moordius said in his most courtly manner:

"It is somewhat *triste* to dine alone. Valerie, who is an invalid, does not dine. She scarcely ever eats. Now that I have a table companion who both eats and dines, I hope my habits will be more domestic."

Suzanne laughed: "So, if you don't come home to dinner, I shall know the reason why. It's a great responsibility."

"I think we shall understand each other," said Moordius.

"I'm sure of it," said Suzanne.

Valerie sat with pinched lips and looked from one to the other with her cold expressionless eyes.

"I'm sure you will bring changes into the household, Mademoiselle."

"For that," said Moordius, "I bless the memory of my dear old friend."

When dinner was over, they went into the drawing-room, where, French fashion, coffee and liqueurs were served. Valerie presided over cups and glasses like a pale shade out of a Greek tragedy. Moordius took his guest around the room discoursing on the gems among his pictures and objects of art. He had a couple of exquisite Daubignys, also a Gauguin, a strangely posed

dusky nude bought years ago for a song and now worth thousands. It was always gratifying, said he, apologizing for the commercial note, when artistic instinct found itself justified by a consensus of human judgment. He sketched the life of this fanatical being driven to the remotest ends of the earth by the craving to express his soul in terms of paint. Then he turned to a cabinet of Græco-Roman glass, slender iridescent, fragile as soap-bubbles. In each of them, said he, a world of love.

"Why cannot one take human material—the finest clay—a child"—she saw his eyes flicker for an instant towards Valerie who had resumed her novel—"and put such love into its moulding as would make it as one of these, perfect in beauty?"

"It might be possible," said Suzanne, "but to do it one would have to be a great artist as well."

"Ah!" sighed Moordius. "You are right. The artificers of souls are the rarest of all."

Half an hour afterwards he left them. Affairs. Eternal affairs. He kissed Valerie paternally on the brow, pressed Suzanne's hand warmly. A touch of the bell, when she retired, he assured her, and all the resources of Paris were at her disposal.

"I shall have," said Suzanne, "what all Paris couldn't give me. Sleep and a grateful heart."

The air of the room seemed colder when he had gone, the discreetly lit, picture-hung walls and the quiet furniture, strangely unfamiliar. In a low chair under the shaded lamp, far away from the door, lay Valerie, a pale phantom in black regarding her with eyes always coldly hostile. Suzanne knitted a perplexed brow. It was quite possible that the secret of Madame Doon's attitude was resentment of intrusion. In that case, better have it out

with her at once. In her direct way she advanced to the attack.

"I hope you don't think, Madame, that I am here of my own free will. Circumstances force me to live beneath your father's roof. If you are ignorant of them, I will tell you willingly."

"I know, I know, Mademoiselle. The conditions of a great fortune——"

"Which being human and young, I should be an idiot to refuse."

"Perfectly."

"Well then. Let us be frank about it," said Suzanne. "I'm perfectly helpless. I've got to stay with Mr. Moordius for six months every year till I'm twenty-five. You have a perfect right, from your point of view, to hate the sight of me coming in and upsetting everything; but if you do, you make my position intolerable. We must come to an understanding. I'll put as much good will into the matter as you like. Only, as I said before, for heaven's sake let us be frank."

"Quite so," said Valerie, not changing her languid attitude. "Let us be open with each other. I tell you truthfully, Mademoiselle, that I have no such feelings as you attribute to me. You are indeed welcome, I assure you. Perhaps more welcome than you could imagine."

At the last words her voice softened a little and rang sincere.

"I'm sorry to have misunderstood," said Suzanne, "in one way; in another I'm glad."

The manservant brought in a teapot of camomile and cups on a silver tray. Suzanne laughed gaily:

"Now I know I'm in France again."

Moordius, redeeming his promise, carried out the pro-

gram of gaiety. He cast her loose among the frippery shops of the Rue de la Paix so that she arrayed herself, for the first time in her life, in the manifold garments of luxury. If her independence, said Moordius, would not permit her to accept a few chiffons from him, he would keep the bills and present them for reimbursement when she came into her own. With interest, yes, if she insisted. So the bills were sent into Moordius, while she took careful note of expenses, so that she could checkmate him if he tried to play the game of a too careless generosity. Thus equipped and heralded by a rumour of her great fortune she entered the social world of Paris like a young queen. She dined in elaborate houses, at expensive restaurants, drove about in sleek automobiles, consorted with women consummately gowned and grand-ducally bejewelled; danced her young fill at afternoon tea resorts and in ball-rooms of fashionable hotels. Moordius acted the part of initiator, with Valerie cold and uninterested as chaperon. But soon half a dozen mothers with marriageable sons came forward and taking in hand the heiress of fabulous millions of francs, introduced her into an ever-widening circle.

At first the new glitter blinded her eyes and she lost sense of values. But after a while, she began to wonder at this social world into which she had been tossed. It was not a vulgar world. It had little relation to that whence came the folk of dreadful opulence whom old Joe Grabbiter had once summoned grimly to his dinner-table. It had good manners, education; it spoke much of money and affairs, it is true; but it also spoke of art and literature and was leavened with artists and writers who clothed themselves correctly and danced the newest steps; it was not cosmopolitan, certainly not *rastaquouère,*

although it agreeably assimilated a foreign element—American, Italian, Spanish, Greek. It was French enough; but it represented a new France—a France at any rate new to the girl bred, apart from her free English traditions, in those of the old provincial aristocracy and of the military caste to which her father belonged. Trying though they were to live with, there had been something indefinably distinguished, lacking in this brilliant society, which the Aunts Mathilde and Germaine of Anjou possessed as their inalienable heritage. There was a laxity in the moral code, all the more dangerous for being disavowed in practice, but proclaimed with disconcerning freedom as a philosophical theory. She disdained the speciousness.

"If two children," she said to Valerie, "discuss their God-given right to paddle in the mud, they'll be sure to paddle in the next mud they see."

"They all paddle," replied Valerie, "if they don't wallow."

Ardently seeking to touch rock-bottom, Suzanne found nothing but hard materialism, a negation of sentiment, save that of self-maintenance at the present standard of physical comfort. It was as though the volcanic eruptions of the war had hardened into unbreakable lava beneath which their souls were infinitely and damnably buried.

Many men of this new strange France came around her, attracted by her English boyishness, her French wit, the rumour of her prospective wealth; and she discovered, with a shock, that few of the wealthy, even those who flaunted strips of ribbon, had fought in the real fierceness of the war. Indeed, most of the men were verging on middle age. The young men in their twenties or early

thirties who thronged around her at dances were mainly youths of neutral nations. Analysis and classification took time; but after a while she found that she could count on her fingers the young Frenchmen in her circle who had gone gallantly through. Of course the flower of French youth, her contemporaries, lay dead, over a million; but there were millions of survivors in France who ought to be found, like colours in a sunset, in every social sphere. Why did they scarcely exist in this dancing, eating, automobiling, glittering set?

"The old France, my dear Suzanne, to which you belong and to which I wish with all my heart Fate had ordained me to belong," said Moordius, replying to some such question, "is mourning its children, nursing its wounds, making the most of its impoverished resources, keeping, in the darkness of its cave, its claw upon such spoils as it has seized and glaring at other hungry nations who might threaten to rob her. These people of French nationality are those, sprung from God knows where, into whose hands the money power of France has fallen. Do not misjudge them. They worked for France in her dark days. They are working for her now—Manourin, Descaves, Mayer——" he rattled off names—"are undertaking vast responsibilities for the sake of the credit of the country—responsibilities they would not have dreamed of before the war. I, in my small way, am doing the same."

"I see," said Suzanne, "but aren't you all spending an awful lot of money in feasting and junketing?"

"We are but nursing the lamp of la Ville Lumière till better times," he replied. "In the meanwhile you are educating yourself in knowledge of the world necessary for you when you come into your fortune. A grain of

cynicism is a powerful antidote against the inevitable evils that will surround you."

"Perhaps you're right."

"I know I am," said he. "If I thought this society wasn't good for you, I should have made other arrangements for your welfare."

This, and other explanations satisfied her for the time. She continued to enjoy herself, and to receive with considerable pleasure the homage of men. Occasionally Valerie warned her against the notorious or the crafty, but she laughed, confident in her judgment and passed all her flirts and admirers in review till the whole regiment was dismissed, withered with irony.

"I'm too modern to fall into the arms of a man for the asking," she said. "I've seen too many of them not to be able to distinguish between the sheep and the goats or the shepherds and the satyrs. And both kinds here make me laugh. No, my dear, it is only I who, in God's good time, shall choose the man I'm going to marry."

"But suppose he doesn't want you?"

"Then I'll wait and choose another who does," replied Suzanne. Decidedly, her father's daughter was for him whom she should select among the sons of men. Suzanne held her head high.

After the first evening's talk she had made friends with Valerie as far as that reserved woman would admit any one into her friendship. At the most, this was a sincere negation of hostile attitude; at the least, it was a colourless acceptance of companionship. Now and then Valerie went with Suzanne into the world of pleasure seekers, but she moved in it like a dark ghost, uninterested, indifferent, going through the various social performances with the precise ease of an automaton. Her attitude to

her father, whether at home or abroad, remained unchanged. There were times when Suzanne, generous and indignant, would have loved to rise and beat her. She had set herself to study father and daughter, observing with her quick wit and recording in her strong mind. She concluded that, with the exception of her own paragon among men, there had never been a father more indulgent. Valerie's every whim was a law most punctiliously to be executed. Every intonation into which a shadow of graciousness might be divined was received with the gleaming smile of appreciation. The caustic, the cruel passed unresented, save for a quiver of the small thin lips; and, responsively, Suzanne felt his pain like a knife through her heart.

Occasionally, for a man has to be a man and assert himself as a man, he would lose control and make sharp retort to Valerie's veiled insolence. And Suzanne within herself commended him. It served her right. Once she rose from the table in a fit of anger and left the room.

"You've got the patience of an angel," said Suzanne.

"My dear," said he, "there you are wrong. I haven't. Angels don't have reacting nerves. I try to bear with Valerie because she has passed through terrible affliction. The shock of her husband's death almost unseated her reason. I haven't spoken of this to you before. A delicate, a most delicate matter which one would prefer to keep in the sad secrecy of one's heart. But you are now in the intimacy of us both. So I will tell you my great sorrow. This nerve-shock, this lesion of the brain, or whatever it may be, has resolved itself into a dull hatred of myself, her father. Why, I don't know. Otherwise she is as normal as you or I. That is why I have postponed this painful avowal. I thought she would

have the wit or the mere habit of the world to conceal from you this—for me—harrowing animosity. But now you are on your guard if she speaks evil of me."

"She has never done so."

"She will."

"*Mon pauvre ami,*" cried Suzanne, stretching out her hand and her heart with it, across the corner of the table. "This tragedy in your life—I never suspected it. You so kind, so generous——"

Her eyes grew moist. He raised her hand to his lips.

"My dear little Suzanne," said he, with a smile in his blue eyes which seemed to hold the patient sorrow of all the world, "I wonder if you can realize what your beautiful sympathy means to me."

He relinquished her hand. Suzanne had not a word to say, moved by a great pity poignantly akin to love. The woman in her strove to comfort him in his affliction. The bright courage reasserted itself in his eyes.

"This has been said between us, once and for all. We'll never refer to it again."

He selected a cigar from the silver box in front of him, removed the band and clipped the point with a silver cutter. Suzanne struck a match and held it out until his cigar was lit.

"The cigar of my life," said he, with a bow.

In the drawing-room there was no Valerie. Suzanne poured out the coffee and Moordius's tiny liqueur glass of the old green Chartreuse of which he still had a dozen or so in his cellar.

"I wish," said he, when, having finished cigar, coffee and liqueur, he announced a dismal engagement, "I wish you would be so beautifully kind as to see what has hap-

pened to Valerie. Sometimes these *crises des nerfs* are dangerous."

She found Valerie, kimono clad, reading a novel in the boudoir opening out from her bedroom. As she entered, Valerie threw the book at random and sprang up with unusual animation.

"Go away," she cried. "I don't want to see you. You've come to talk to me about my father. I know you side with him. I saw it in your eyes this evening when he insulted me."

"Of course, my dear girl," said Suzanne, "I've come to talk to you about your father. Why do you treat him like this?"

Valerie moved towards the bedroom.

"I'll tell you, you little fool, because you ought to know——" the cold dark eyes leaped into sudden blaze —"my father's a devil."

She fled into the bedroom and slammed the door, and Suzanne heard the quick snap of the key.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT was the end of the matter. In the days that followed, Valerie made no allusion to her outburst of invective, and delicacy forbade Suzanne to question farther. Indeed, why should she question? Had not Moordius himself given full explanation and explicit warning? The girl's brain was touched. Physicians, the greatest mental specialists of Paris, said Moordius, had all come to that conclusion. The only hope of regaining the affection she had borne him before the death of her husband lay in his unceasing patience and indulgence. He called Suzanne to witness that he did what he could. Again he seemed angelic.

If Valerie had rolled off a list of grievances, such as, exaggerated, any woman living under the same roof as an insensitive male may have against him, Suzanne would have listened, perhaps incredulously, but yet would have been impelled to examine things below the surface so as to arrive at some basis of truth. But to characterize her father as a devil was the grotesque hyperbole of the mentally unsound. With equal justice might one call her other guardian, Timothy, a devil. Nay with more; for Timothy was lame. Yet Timothy, with cloven hoofs hidden in his sprawling old brown shoes, with their untidy laces, and a tail tucked up somewhere behind his honest old undervests—she had often come upon Dorothy darning them—it was a reduction to the ludicrous. No; the only human being she had ever met who might have possessed a taint of the diabolic was the sardonic old man whom she had so rudely told to hie to the devil's dwelling-

place. It was all very sad; absurdly pathetic. She fell into Moordius's tender way with Valerie.

The magic weeks slipped by. June came and went. Already, after the Grand Prix, the ultra fashionables were leaving Paris for châteaux in the depths of France or villas by the sea. Moordius gave his last dinner party.

"This time, my dear," said he, "it will be more serious and select than those which I have had the privilege of giving in your honour. I'm afraid you will not amuse yourself at all."

"I can suck amusement out of anything," she declared.

"Even a weasel shies at rotten eggs," said Valerie.

"Come, come," smiled Moordius, "it won't be as bad as that."

But when Suzanne took her place at the table, at which some twenty guests were seated, she thought of Valerie's causticity. Her partner was a young Spaniard with a Koh-i-noor of a diamond on his finger and pearls the size of camphor balls in his shirt front. He spoke in execrable French of the twenty-cylindered, hundred horse-power cars he kept in his various garages; of the honeyed sweetness of neutrality; of the streets of Spain paved with German gold childishly lavished; so that Suzanne began to entertain a sort of savage pity for the swindled Hun. He had never heard of Etchgeray and based his admiration for Ibañez on the fact that he had known how to exploit the war in literature. He had not read the marvellous war novel to which he alluded. A hateful vulgar young man. What was he doing at that house? Suzanne turned from him to her right-hand neighbour, a wizened elder in a skull-cap who mumbled of far-off food and forgotten dancers of the Second Empire. . . . Valerie was right. The egg's flavour was not to her taste. The

table blazed with the jewels of elderly women, fat, skinny, all hard-faced. Valerie and herself were the only young women there. Once or twice she caught Moordius's blue eyes and read in them a humorous apology.

In the buzzing drawing-room she talked awhile with a little, beady-eyed American millionaire with an outlandish name and a love for the Italian Eclectics upon whom he threw much light, thereby interesting Suzanne whose fresh soul had found more inspiration in Duccio of Siena than in Caravaggio. She was beginning to like him when Moordius took him off to introduce him to a blazing dowager. Moordius turned to her a moment afterwards.

"If you like to slip away with Valerie, you can. This is a crowd impatient for cards and looks on conversation as a waste of breath."

Even as he spoke, the men-servants brought in a long green baize covered table and began to set chairs around it.

"I'll remain and complete my education," replied Suzanne.

Moordius held up a warning finger. "At any rate promise me you won't play."

She promised gaily. Her three sous of pocket-money would be of little use amid the surrounding opulence.

In a corner of the room a couple of bridge tables were set out; but most of the company gathered round the long table of *chemin de fer*. A man whom Suzanne had not noticed before, wearing a black tie with a black waistcoat and swallow-tailed evening coat, slid silently to the seat in front of the hollowed out space in the centre of the table. She learned soon that he was a professional croupier, hired for the evening. Lots were drawn for the limited number of seats. The remainder of the company

either stood or sat in the *embrasures*—the formal word of the casinos—between the players' chairs. The game began—unintelligible at first to Suzanne, until explanation was given by the young Spaniard who happened to be her standing neighbour. The minimum bank was a thousand francs, the minimum stake for the punt a hundred; fairly high play when it is remembered that the bank changes hand at every loss, and that only a cautious loser would care to avail himself of the minima. The average bank in that wealthy company was five hundred louis, so that after a few wins it had swollen to over a hundred thousand francs. Once, it had reached that figure when Moordius held the bank and the young Spaniard called *"banco"* and won.

"You bring me good luck, Mademoiselle," said he gathering the packets of ten *mille* notes neatly done up with elastic bands.

He had already won a great deal by lucky punting and judicious *bancos*. Suzanne took the first opportunity of edging away from him and standing behind Moordius's chair. She had not yet accustomed herself to the idea of wealth. The golden future before her still seemed a childish promise of fairyland. She judged money still by the standard of her girlhood, when a thousand franc note was a thing to be touched reverently as a symbol of power to command so many good things of the good world. Why, she remembered with a shock, the family income at the most was forty thousand francs a year. And here were people tossing about, on the minute's turn of four or five cards, the amount of money that had maintained them all, in their station of proud gentlefolk, for a whole year. She grew dazed by the bundles of notes that sometimes stacked the table like the red-tape encircled

documents that encumber the desk of a solicitor in oily practice. Fascinated she watched the pile of the little beady-eyed American gradually fade away, until there was nothing left. He searched his pockets, drew out a cheque-book and a fountain pen. The sallow croupier took the cheque, and leaning over to a little table by his side, unlocked a tin dispatch-box. Suzanne saw that it was crammed with bundles of *mille* notes. Had Moordius, in his princely way, emptied the strong room of his bank for the entertainment of his friends?

Many cheques were cashed, redeemed or taken over by players overburdened with paper wealth. The game went on, monotonous in its formal routine, fascinating in its sudden changes of fortune. Suzanne found a seat behind Moordius, and followed his game with an almost sickening anxiety. He was losing heavily. Every now and then, he nodded to the croupier who drew bundles from the dispatch-box and threw them to him across the table. She lost sense of the rest of the uninspiring company. Away in the distance she was aware of a bridge table still going on; of a bridge party breaking up and its occupants creeping like shadows around this expanse of green cloth, lit from the centre, by some magic, she knew not what, and crying *dix louis tombent* or *banco,* and then mingling with the game. All she saw was the dull, stupid faces of the seated men and women, unemotional, heavy, bemused, apparently not caring whether they won or lost. Nay; there was one discovery that aroused her young disgust. By worldly training can the muscles of the face, in good or evil fortune, be controlled. But so few think of the hands. Suzanne looked at the hands of the impossible folk and hated them. There was one woman—a

Madame Ducayne, the wife, so she had learned, of a great man on the Bourse—a jobber, in our Stock Exchange vocabulary, dealing in international securities—a woman in her early forties, beautiful, classic of feature, with just that gracious opulence of figure which is the heritage of apple girlhood—who had sat directly opposite to her at dinner. She had noticed her hands, soft dimpled, long fingered—— Now she sat opposite at the gaming table. Not a feature of her exquisite face betrayed any emotion; but the exquisite hands, when they reached for a winning stake lost their dimples, their suppleness, their sweet tenderness. They grew hard and cold and the veins swelled. And Suzanne, young and imaginative, watched those hands; and unbidden, and incongruous—for what has gaming to do with tragic love?—came before her the memory of Frémiet's statue in the Luxemburg—the hands of the Harpy tearing the young man's flesh, while he is bending over her agonizing for the kiss from her perfect lips.

With this idea in her head she watched the white calm hands of Moordius. Not a tremor marred their graciousness. They were indifferent to good or evil fortune. As she sat in the *embrasure* by his side, he maintained with her a gay little talk. He seemed to regard the varying fortunes of the game as a child's pastime. So might he have been at a Christmas party playing cards for nuts. He was for ever looking round at her, with a gay jest in his clear blue eyes, so that she, in spite of herself, found him eternally young and took no count of his pink bald head and his fringe of white hair.

She remembered one of her father's *obiter dicta:*

"The tragedy of woman lies in the fact that although her instinct craves the essential, she is led astray by the non-essential. She demands a soul and she succumbs to a moustache."

He was losing heavily. The greatest winner and, save Moordius, the highest player, was the young Spaniard who had taken a vacated seat. Cheques that had purchased *mille* notes were put by the croupier, as it were, into circulation. The gap in the dispatch-box grew alarming. As the night wore on the interest of the game centred in the duel between the host and his Spanish guest; the others had won or lost enough and played a small and cautious game. At last, the hand coming to Moordius, he threw a bundle of ten thousand francs on the table.

"My last, if I lose," said he. "It is my rule—my gambler's superstition. You'll forgive me; but at any rate, Señor Castara, you will have had the privilege of breaking the bank of Moordius—without, thank goodness, the Company."

Suzanne stood up for a second and glanced at the open dispatch-box. It was empty.

"Banco," cried the Spaniard, and Moordius dealt him a ten and a nine.

He handed him the notes with a smile, and leaned back in his chair.

"A fickle goddess."

"She can't be constant to two men at a time or she'd be a dreary thing like Justice and no sort of goddess at all," said Suzanne.

That was the end of the game. The company drifted into the dining-room where a buffet was laid out with cold things and champagne. The young Spaniard went

about bulging at various points of his person, like an Ephesian Cybele with breasts out of place.

Most of the chatter was of sums lost and won, of lucky exercises of judgment, of maledictions on the folly that had counselled passing a bank that ran afterwards ten times. Suzanne found them even a duller congregation than at dinner.

"My dear," said Moordius, after he had bowed the last guest out, "how can I express my gratitude to you for sticking to me to the bitter end of this boring party? Half-past two. I thought they would never go. You must be dead weary."

"Not a bit," said Suzanne. "The play excited me. I've never seen gambling before."

"What do you think of it?"

"It terrifies me—and I'm not a person easily scared. As you play, it has its grand side. Otherwise it seems silly. You must have lost a fortune tonight."

"A trifle. A good host must lay himself out to entertain his guests."

"It's an expensive form of entertainment," said Suzanne. "It cost you four hundred thousand francs." Moordius waved a protesting hand. "I counted them in the box," she continued. "Eight rows of *elastiques* five deep."

He took her hand by way of courteous dismissal—they were near the open door—and raised it to his lips.

"La bonne petite femme de ménage. Bon soir."

"Bon soir," she said and flashed: *"Beau joueur."*

He watched her for a moment sweep down the corridor with her air of a young Diana, a look of curious, unsmiling satisfaction on a face suddenly grown tired and old. When she had disappeared round the corner, he

followed in her wake to his library, where he threw himself heavily into an arm-chair and looked around at the things of beauty, furniture, pictures, sculpture, books rarely bound which three generations, his grandfather, his father, he himself had patiently and learnedly acquired and preserved through the multitudinous siftings of a connoisseurship that had its germ in the soul of some far off Jewish ancestor. There were many beautiful things in that sumptuous double apartment of his in the Avenue Gabriel; but this was the room of rooms, and every object in it meant the firm survival of the love, taste, thought of three generations of men, the moods of a moment unerringly eliminated for the preservation of that which was eternal. On entering he had fortuitously switched on the light of a shaded lamp on his writing table, a kidney-shaped buhl exquisitely inlaid. In the half gloom the books, ceiling high, glowed comfortingly autumnal in their shagreen and russet and subdued dignity of gold. The old Dutch pictures, Van Ostade, Van der Meer, on the dark spaces of the wall, loomed slumberingly companionable. Like a dusky white moth, far away by the window glimmered the upper fragment truncated at waist, of an alabaster Diana, found near Abydos, one ear missing, the one exposed huntress breast eaten and mutilated, but proud, untroubled, her beauty immortally defiant of the ravages of Time.

Somehow she had the same poise of the head as that of the girl whose white shoulders and white dress had merged into one dim gleam at the end of the corridor.

He passed his hand over a tired brow and his tongue over dry lips. *"Beau joueur,"* she had called him. How much fuller of fragrance was the Gallic phrase than the

English "sport" or "sportsman"; it was perfumed with breeding; it conjured up gesture; a pinch of snuff and a dust of lace ruffles and—"Master Executioner, I am at your disposition." The girl had the quality which gives insight. In spite of weariness he glowed at the just tribute. *Beau joueur.*

"I'm that at any rate," said he.

A few days afterwards, announced by Moordius and heralded by one of his bald and awkward letters, came Timothy to Paris. Moordius had offered him a room in the apartment; but scared by Suzanne's allusions to the gilded luxury in which she had her being, he yielded to his timidity and perched in an attic in the Hôtel Continental.

"I shall feel freer, my dear fellow, really," he said. "I've not been to Paris since I was a boy. There are sights——"

"Ah!" Moordius interrupted with a laugh.

Timothy reddened in confusion. "Oh! not those—believe me. I shouldn't dream—— But I should like to go to the Invalides and the Morgue, and, oh, yes—the Louvre. That sort of thing. And there used to be such a jolly little restaurant in the Palais Royal——"

"My God!" cried Moordius, turning in horror to Suzanne. "If we want to keep him alive, we mustn't allow him to eat out of our sight!"

Still Timothy had his way. He was happier alone, in his little hotel room he explained to Suzanne, than in the unaccustomed splendour of the Avenue Gabriel. The exotic affected his breathing. He needed more air. Besides, he added, he had come over solely on business, and he had not been accustomed to live domestically in a

business atmosphere, or vice versa. He knew it was ungracious towards Moordius for whom he professed the profoundest admiration; but it was best he should sleep out of his atmosphere.

"I'm afraid I'm not intelligible, but it's something like that."

But Suzanne quite understood. She had become an expert in interpretation of Timothy's psychological flounderings.

"My affairs must be an awful worry to you."

He looked at her for a moment before realizing her mistake.

"I'm not here on your affairs at all. Only my own."

"With Mr. Moordius? You are thinking of going in with him?"

Timothy opened his eyes wide. "How did you guess?"

"When a man goes into a jeweller's shop, you may safely bet he's not there to buy veal cutlets," she said with a laugh, in which Timothy, whose sense of humour was only tickled by the obvious, joined heartily.

"Yes. That's it. I'm going into matters."

"I'm awfully glad. Mr. Moordius says you're being thrown away where you are. It would make you blush all over if I told you what he thinks of you. Why you're beginning already. I don't know whether I'm talking quite respectfully to my late employer and my present guardian. You've got to take me as I am."

Timothy grew redder. The words: "I wish to Heaven I could!" rose hot from his heart, but froze on his lips. Instead, he mumbled:

"You're just the same as ever."

In order that they should have a long and intimate talk she invited herself to tea at the Continental. Better

for that purpose than the Ritz where she would meet all the bores of her acquaintance or at Columbin's where they danced to deafening jazz. So they sat at the restaurant end of the long gallery by the balustrade separating them from the cool courtyard and Timothy gave her news of Naomi and Phoebe and Angela Messiter, the demure little governess whom she had so summarily engaged. All was well. Better than he had dreamed possible. All due to her *flair* in picking out the one governess who could control the two brats determined on rebellion against new and resented authority. Of course Miss Messiter could not be Suzanne. That no one in this wide world but Suzanne herself could be. He made great hash of this explanation; but it was clear to Suzanne who helped him out in her frank and ironical way. Miss Messiter was accomplishing great things by mildness and patience; but still. . . .

"Now you've got a dove instead of a hawk," she interrupted. "I was always swooping on those unfortunate kiddies."

"Their nails are certainly not as clean as they used to be," said Timothy.

Vaguely, jerkily, he conveyed to her not the fact—for he had a loyal soul—but the impression that the tea-hour, once golden, had paled into silver. Had he been the slyest Don Juan alive, out for the capture of women's hearts, he could not have calculated more subtly on his boggling tribute. Suzanne's quick mind leaped at once to the contrast, so vivid in his, between herself and the new-comer which his delicacy forbade him to express. Never had she been so deliciously flattered, her essentiality set at so high a value.

"So you do miss me a bit?"

He flung out a hand in an unwonted gesture which sent his tea-cup flying and crashing on the floor.

"I see you do." She laughed at his disconcerted face, while a waiter made swift clearance of wreckage. Then all of a sudden she became aware of pain in Timothy's patient eyes, and the meaning of it dawned on her. The laughter died like a blown out flame.

"I'm sorry," she said, "so sorry."

But whether she was apologizing for the laughter or the pain she scarcely knew.

"Of course I miss you," he said, recovering himself.

"I'm a conservative sort of fellow, you know, and would miss a cat that had lived in the house, even if it hadn't taken much notice of me."

She smiled, faintly, understanding. It was like old Timothy to run away and hide. Her silence brought him to a realization of the possible uncomplimentary.

"And if a cat, how much more you. You're so splendid. Like the mainspring of a watch. When you went, everything seemed to run down. However," he continued hurriedly, "you're coming back in November."

"Then I shall be promoted to sit up to dinner with you—at least, I hope so. It will be lovely."

"For me, yes! But for you——?"

"Just give me a bit of material and I'll make my own loveliness out of it."

She rose. Timothy rose too, before replying.

"I'm afraid I can't give you much," said he wistfully.

"Oh, yes, you can. If only the privilege of sending you out of the house with your tie straight. Do you mind?" With deft fingers she gave his sailor-knotted tie a twist and a pull. "That naked collar stud has been reproaching me all the afternoon."

Timothy accompanied her to the Avenue Gabriel, walking on air. That little touch of her fingers had made a world of difference, establishing an intimate relation that had not before existed. She was no longer the perfect governess suddenly transformed into a dismaying legal responsibility. The act had asserted a quasi-family link. He pondered over the new idea for some twenty yards until a newer and brighter one struck him, while they were waiting for a pause in the hectic traffic to cross the rue Royale.

"It seems—in the light of our position with regard to each other—so formal and stilted to call me Mr. Swayne. I've been wondering whether you could call me—say Uncle Timothy."

For a moment she gasped, as one does at the unexpected, and then burst into gay laughter, her grip at the same time restraining him from precipitated slaughter beneath the wheels of a forty horse-power Car of Juggernaut.

"You are so funny—but a dear, as I've told you before. Uncle! Why that's what every one has called them from the days of naughty old popes and abbots." She took his arm again. "Now we can cross, if I haven't paralysed you with shock. No—that won't do at all."

"It was only a notion of mine," he said, when, somewhat crestfallen, they had reached safety.

"But on the other hand"—her clear voice struck a note of consolation—"I don't see any reason why I shouldn't call you Timothy."

"By Jove!" he cried, his face lighting up. "Neither do I."

He spent a happy week in Paris, happy everywhere

save in one spot, the apartment of the Avenue Gabriel. Suzanne, helpful and delicious, accompanied him on his unsophisticated sight-seeing during the day, and Moordius urbanely joined them at night. When he went contentedly to bed in his little hotel room, the Pantheon and the Musée Cluny and the Folies-Bergère and the Rat Mort jumbled themselves up delightfully inextricable in his dreams. He felt the exhilaration of a furious rate of living, of performing the fabulous feat of drinking the cup of pleasure to its dregs. All that side of his Paris life was sheer joy. The new intimacy with Suzanne was a revelation of things almost too sweetly human to be true. In Moordius, he wonderingly found a devoted admirer, an altruistic friend. The hours he spent in the discreetly luxurious bank offices in the rue Boissy d'Anglas passed like enchanted moments. To think in terms of thousands was the most natural thing in the world. The mud-raking instincts that had chained his mind earthward had been exercised like the devils that, entering into a man, had directed his soul to all manner of abomination. The result was a new Timothy, a clear-brained, fearless Timothy, a Timothy with a Vision. He could look into the Future, as far as eye could see, and behold Naomi a great heiress, in a great house set among green lawns, spreading elms, with shining horses and glittering motor-cars and coroneted suitors at her command. Before him too the mystery of travel, the glamour of indigo seas and the scented dusk of far-off lands. His eyes were opened to the golden heavens. When he cast them down again he beheld himself gathering naught but fungus year after year in the mildewed firm of Combermere, Son & Combermere, growing more and more insensible to the call of the glad earth, condemning his child, the Symbolic Hope of

the New World (Moordius had set the phrase in capitals) to the lichen strangulation of a sunless existence. Once the scales were removed from his mind he could think just as easily in those terms of hyperbole as in thousands. Moordius, that wonderful, pink, bald, white-haired man, with the clear blue eyes and unwrinkled face of eternal youth, with his vitality, his invigoration, and his seduction, reacted on him like the sparkling wine in an enchanter's cup, so that when he left the screened light of the office and emerged into the glare of the July street, he strode along, forgetful of his limp, magically intoxicated.

In the apartment of the Avenue Gabriel, however, his exhilaration died down, nipped by a chilly wind. As much as anything, the dread of living beneath the same roof as the subject of his horrible secret, in the first place, decided his refusal of hospitality. After meeting Valerie he congratulated himself on his instinct. Moordius's deep paternal love was as obvious as the girl's cold hatred. Suzanne could explain things as she liked. The shock of grief could no doubt upset reason. But it was his melancholy lot to probe deeper into the unhappy mystery than any living being. The knowledge terrified him. Neither of these people had ever dreamed that they were not father and daughter, bound by the ties of blood. He alone knew they were alien in every fibre of heredity. In moods when her indifference hardened into cruelty, he caught elusive gleams of a wicked old face flitting across her dark features. In her voice he detected the ghost of a Grabbiter rasp. Behind her eyes played the dull sardonic light in which strange purposes were hidden. For all her darkness of colouring and languor of body, her mother's gifts, as he learned from Moordius, she

betrayed—to Timothy supersensitive and endowed with the second sight of knowledge—her old Joe Grabbiter fatherhood in a thousand ways. He remembered the old man's long monkey upper lip meeting the lower in a sarcastic curl at the corners. There, modified by sex, and possibly the mother's share in formation of features, on the girl's mouth, could be read the same Grabbiter grimness; yet by him alone; for he alone held the key of the cryptogram.

The pity which his heart had originally conceived for the duped friend swelled a hundred-fold, when he came face to face with the self-considered father and daughter in their actual life. That unusual phrase which Moordius had once used, the Romance of Vengeance, again recurred to him. Was it possible for a human being to inspire his child, whom he had apparently neither seen nor communicated with since her birth, with his own revengeful malignity? This was a solution, far fetched, unphilosophic, just the sort of bogey idea, thought Timothy, that would come into his dull old head; but a solution all the same; all the more terrible because the grief theory failed to convince. No, apart from the fantastic, there was the simple explanation of heredity. She was just bad and ungracious like her father before her; a selfish, self-centred, self-opinionated minx. Not her fault perhaps. With that, however, he decided in his plain way, he had nothing to do. It was Moordius who claimed all his sympathy, Moordius, with all his wealth and his wonder, condemned to the part of the tragic dupe till his life's end.

With these prejudices in his mind Timothy did not get on with Valerie. When thrown with her by chance he

was as dumb as a fish. Naturally she judged him by ordinary social standards. The drabbest bore of an awkward Englishman she had ever met. But for Suzanne who seemed to have a regard for the dull lame dog, she would have let loose upon him the shafts of her satire.

"I wish you and Timothy could make friends," said Suzanne one night, when they were alone together in Valerie's boudoir.

"I don't want to hurt you," replied Valerie, drawing away the match from a cigarette she was about to light. "You like him. There's no accounting for tastes. But I——? How can one make friends with a dried bit of wood?"

"Oh, he's much more than that," laughed Suzanne. She knew her Valerie—or thought she did, which, for the time, was all the same thing. "Even if he was, a spark and a breath and he could be in a flame. Your fault. So your metaphor's no good. Anyhow he isn't."

"Well, a bit of wet wood. Even more uninteresting."

"A fool then?" said the direct Suzanne.

"It's you who say it, my dear."

Suzanne flashed. "There you're wrong. Whatever grudge you may have against your father, you must acknowledge that he doesn't suffer fools gladly."

"He suffers their money with whoops of joy."

"Money? Timothy? Why poor old Timothy has only tuppence ha'penny in the world."

"That's enough for my father."

"Oh! you're crazy!" cried Suzanne.

"Perhaps," replied Valerie, recumbent, kimono-draped as usual, puffing her cigarette. "But if you're really in-

terested in this moth-eaten troubador of yours, bid him beware of Peter Moordius."

"You're simply beastly," cried Suzanne, hurrying to the door.

"The gipsy's second warning," drawled Valerie.

CHAPTER IX

TIMOTHY, bold as a lion in Paris, was beset by his mouse-like timidities when he reached London and prepared to set his financial house in order. It may be said, at once, that the gipsy's warning had nothing to do with his fears; for it had not been conveyed to him by a scornful Suzanne. He dreaded not so much the future as the immediate present. From day to day he postponed the inevitable interview with his partners of Combermere, Son & Combermere. To leave them seemed an act of ingratitude, disloyalty, even treachery. When at last he decided and stood with his hand on the knob of old Combermere's door, perspiration filled the deep corrugations of his brow, and his heart thumped horribly. He entered with the air of a guilty clerk about to confess his defalcations.

Instead of withering him up with curses old Combermere fell back in his chair.

"God bless my soul," said he. "What are we going to do without you? Let us send for Augustus."

The autumn leaf blew in and listened. He proclaimed himself damned. The senior partner repeated his question.

"Put our noses to the infernal grindstone, I suppose," said Augustus. "Timothy does all the work. It'll be our turn now."

Timothy reddened. "Augustus is talking nonsense, Mr. Combermere."

Samuel Combermere, virulently described by old Mr. Grabbiter as a long-necked hypocrite with the face of a sanctimonious giraffe, whose only human passions (known

to Timothy) were collecting the offertory at church and mediaeval weapons—he specialized in battle-axes—at home, joined him in depreciation of Augustus's youthful cynicism.

"We all do our duty, I trust; but Swayne, I admit, has done yeoman service."

The autumn leaf's brow shrivelled. "I don't like the phrase, father, but let it pass." He turned to Timothy. "You're a lucky chap, anyhow, to be clearing out. I wish I had the chance. Accountancy's a dog's trade."

Timothy was astonished. Instead of being execrated he was envied. Wingate, the fourth partner, was summoned. In a sedater manner than Augustus, he wondered who would do Timothy's work. That question seemed to be their main concern. Wingate threw out a suggestion that the offer of a larger share in the business might induce Timothy to reconsider his retirement, a ninth or even eighth instead of his present tenth. Would he stay for an eighth? asked Samuel. The airy Augustus took the wind out of the sails of the two elders and allowed a hesitating Timothy to escape.

"Let us offer him a half, and he's a damn fool if he takes it."

"I'm afraid, gentlemen," said Timothy, "I shouldn't be justified—having regard to my position in the firm—in accepting Augustus's suggestion."

The autumn leaf crumpled into laughter, in which the perturbed Wingate joined, and even old Samuel's long face twisted into a smile. Timothy conjecturing that perhaps he had said something humorous, laughed too. Samuel recalled the firm to the business in hand. They were prepared to meet Swayne as far as they could; but there were limits, of course. Timothy looked round at

the three faces, for the first time in his life conscious of power. They wanted him. They were prepared to pay, within reason, his price for saving them from the burden and heat of the chartered accountant's day. He reflected that the hardest headed of old sinners, Joe Grabbiter, had wanted him; that Moordius—a name to conjure with, as he had learned from unsophisticated enquiries—wanted him also. The stock of Timothy Swayne was at a premium. The long-headed Samuel and the fat-jowled Wingate looked at him anxiously. The bright-eyed Augustus with the brown face of a withered boy regarded him encouragingly and motioned with his head as though urging him to stick to his guns.

"I'm very sorry," said he, "but I'm afraid my mind is made up."

"In that case," said Augustus, "let us get on."

The discussion proceeded in the friendliest manner. A copy of the deed of partnership looked through as a matter of formality, showed Timothy entitled to retire with his share in October.

Augustus, accompanying him into the corridor, shook him warmly by the hand.

"You're well out of it. This ramshackle old show's going to blazes. No push. Except the old man who pushes backwards. They'd never hear of giving you your head and now they'll get it in the neck," said he with airy mixture of metaphors. "Of course I'll have to do something. But thank God I'm independent"—he had married money—"so it doesn't very much matter to me." He looked at Timothy brightly and gave him a gossamer slap on the shoulder. "Moordius & Co., eh? Who would have thought it? Lucky, lucky old devil. Come and lunch."

Timothy did not know what to make of it. He found himself elevated in the social scale of Combermere, Son & Combermere. The old man asked him to dine at his home in Hampstead where he found a solid company assembled. He took in Mrs. Combermere. On previous occasions he had sat, as it were, below the salt. The exaggerated word had gone round that he had become a partner in the great Paris house of Moordius & Co., which was very confusing to Timothy who was still vague as to his exact future position. A gentleman from Throgmorton Street discoursed with anxious learning on the fluctuations of the value of the franc, and Timothy, by his sphinx-like comments acquired reputation. This, though embarrassing, was not unpleasant. It produced an agreeable giddiness in which things unreal assumed a comic air of reality. Perhaps he was a great financier without knowing it. He chuckled all the way home in the tube.

From that day Timothy studied the money market and the dark questions of international credits. In the evenings, Bell's "Life in London" and the acrostic page in the Sunday paper gave place to financial articles in the daily and weekly press and in solemn monthly reviews; so that by the time he started with the children on his annual holiday, he was equipped with a dozen contradictory, red-hot, incontrovertible theories on the stabilization of international exchange. Luckily, at the seaside, where he joined his sister Gertrude with the Reverend Barton and the rest of the family in a furnished house, he had little opportunity for studying. He lived in unceasing racket. The only peaceful time he had was when he stuck his head under water while bathing, a condition

in which no man can think coherently of the money market.

Meanwhile Suzanne continued her pleasant life in France. For the first part of August she found herself in the odd quietude of Anjou with Aunts Germaine and Mathilde. They lived in a dead old square house set in a couple of acres of ground at the main entry into a decaying old town that not being able to live up to its cathedral seemed to have died of despair. Being in tender mood she adapted herself humorously to the subfuscous environment of faded furniture and faded faces and faded minds. She attired herself in dark harmony with the prevailing black of the little circle of elderly acquaintances, the cathedral clergy, the notary, the doctor—the only males—widows bewailing that they were not wives, rusty wives who envied the widows (such is the perverse attitude of irreproachable woman towards peccant man) and spinsters who had coifed Saint Catherine long ago. A dim and devout society bred in the shadow of the cathedral, blinking at the sun. Its members carried about them a perpetual odour of incense and candles. Inside the vast building, they seem to do nothing but creep along the stone floor between the creaking cane-seated chairs. To the wonder of the soaring shafts carrying the ribs of fairy vaulting, to the throbbing appeal of traceried windows, to the far-off mystery of light stealing from the apse above the altar, they had never lifted their eyes. So said Suzanne. Outside, they turned their glance aside from the gargoyles which offended them.

This she discovered while talking with the youngest of the friends whom she met at the aunts' house, an un-

married woman in her mid thirties, who had the eyes of one haunted by accursed visions. She found herself delivering a lecture on the Gothic spirit and the significance of gargoyles.

"I go in there," she said, "to have my breath caught, to have my poor little soul snatched up to Heaven by the spirits of the old builders. I feel near God who inspired man with this immortal beauty. Don't you see?"

"It's a beautiful cathedral, the pride of us all. Tourists come to see it from all over the world, English, American—even Brazilians. Oh, you mustn't think we don't appreciate our cathedral."

Mademoiselle Mercadet obviously did not see. Suzanne's impatient impulse was to open her eyes. Conditions were not favourable for such an operation. The closely shuttered *salon* of the dead little house in which her aunts lived, was dark as a crypt save for a streak or two of freakish August sunlight that zigzagged through chinks on wall and floor. Through a little curtained doorway loomed the blackness of a smaller and darker ghostly room. In a prim circle around the walls, old French fashion, the sombre guests were ranged as though eternally waiting for something—dancing dogs or a snaky-vested contortionist, or Theodora in her prime—to bound into the dreary ring. The two were sitting just within this curtained doorway and talked in low tones so as not to be overheard by neighbours.

"What I'm trying to express," said Suzanne, "is this, that, except for the multitude of priests, the tentacles of the Church, who gather all you women in, you are not more spiritually moved than in some horrid sham Gothic *paroisse* built fifty years ago."

"One prays God anywhere."

Suzanne agreed. Naturally. An uncontested proposition. But a thing of exquisite poetry like the cathedral was lyrical. It made one want to sing God. It sent one out into the open air with the yearning to seek the Eternal Message in sky and plain and other cities and temples built by man *ad majorem Dei Gloriam*. The cathedral was a quickening inspiration. Not a tomb. Well—yes; for all these old women to bury their guileless pasts. But Suzanne's modernity revolted at a young woman contentedly burying in it her future.

"Tell me," she said suddenly. "You are a good Christian. You want to go to Heaven. So do I. But with all wonderful human life in front of you, why do you choose to go to it through the Valley of the Shadow of Death?"

Mademoiselle Mercadet glanced around at her neighbours engaged in domestic confidences, each absorbed in her own story and totally uninterested in her friend's, and fixed her unsatisfied eyes on Suzanne.

"What would you have? One must love something. If one hasn't a man, one falls back on the *bon Dieu*. Where is there a man in this town? They are all dead in the war. I had a *filleul de guerre*. I made my dreams. I saw him once. He was married. *Il m'a plantée la!* . . . It's all very well for you to talk. You are young. You are rich. You go into the great world. You can pick what men you want——" With an effort, she restrained gesture and voice and then a hunted glance around. "But I? What can I do? My mother *dévote*. My aunt *dévote*. No money. And I am tied here, to bewail, like Jephthah's daughter, my virginity, not upon the mountains, but in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, as you truly remarked, Mademoiselle."

"I'm sorry," said Suzanne softly.

That was all she could say. Clémence Mercadet was as fast-bound in Dreuil, as in a State prison. For how, without money, friends, talents, youth, good looks, could she go forth and live out the life craved by her womanhood?

"So you see why we others, when we go out of the cathedral, aren't in the least inclined to sing. One doesn't feel lyrical at all."

Suzanne was filled with quick pity. She rose and she took Mlle. Mercadet's arm and they stepped through the doorway into the tiny saloon beyond, very dark and musty, chiefly furnished by a vast bureau where the aunts wrote their letters and made up their monthly accounts.

"Come into the great world, as you call it, with me, for a month or two. We're going to Deauville, Aix-les-Bains, Biarritz. As my guest of course. I'd give you a good time. Seriously I mean it."

Mademoiselle Mercadet looked at the girl as she stood fresh, eager, mistress of fate, her breath somewhat taken away by the unexpected proposition. Then she shrank with sudden fear of the unknown.

"No, no, Mademoiselle. Your generosity bewilders me. I am grateful. But I have fear of these places. They would terrify me. I shouldn't dare. I am here for my life."

And that was all Suzanne could get out of her.

Afterwards, during the inevitable discussion of the afternoon guests, Aunt Mathilde said:

"I saw you having a long talk with Clémence Mercadet. She is a good girl, but I'm afraid she is bitten by the modern ideas which are spreading among young people

nowadays. The spirit of independence that she manifests is a great sorrow to her dear mother."

"How does she show it, *ma tante?*"

Both aunts talked politely at once reciting a litany of misdemeanours; the most flagrant that of going to a cinema by herself one day without even asking permission.

"But, my dears," laughed Suzanne, "she's thirty-five years old, and besides, where's the harm? In London I often go to cinemas by myself."

"London is England, and you're half English. And you haven't a mother to guide you. It's all quite different."

She would not argue with the mild, courtly ladies—Aunt Mathilde faded and thin, who, save for a brief tempestuous guardianship in Nice, had lived her spinster life from birth in Dreuil, and Aunt Germaine, also faded, but stout, a widow before she, Suzanne, was born—who, forgetful of or forgiving past infractions of their code, had received her with such gentle hospitality. They had accepted her as the Spoiled Child, the Prodigal Daughter, almost the unrepentant Magdalene whetting curiosities. The Imp of Malice whispered in her ear that perhaps the legend of her new wealth had something to do with their indulgence. And the Imp, without undue cynicism, may have been right. Riches and poverty have this in common, and they were unquestionable chaperons. Beggar-maid and princess can each go where she wills without shocking proprieties. In the little town of Dreuil, Suzanne was the princess, the chartered libertine of fortune; there was no doubt of it. So, while the poor little peccadilloes of Clémence Mercadet were written in the thickest and smudgiest of violet ink, her own outrageous of-

fences were, for the sake of formality, inscribed in water.

Of the life, absolutely moral, according to her modern standards, that she led in Paris, the flirtations, the dancing, the gambling, the frequentation of grave satyrs and Saint Nitouche Maenads, she told little or nothing. Why shock unworldly and uncomprehending ears? In fact she forgot all about it in this little restful world draped with lawn on which the tiniest little sin stood out like an accusing speck of blood.

Now and again it seemed unreal, amusing, irritating, peopled with phantoms instead of vibrating human beings; and yet, when she drove off in the vast car which Moordius had sent to whirl her in a day to Deauville, her eyes were filled with tears. Why they were there she dimly knew. It was a narrow-minded will-enshackling little place. Sooner than live there a cowed, caged leopardess like Clémence Mercadet she would commit suicide. She hated the priestly element that dominated the town's society—the ubiquitous courteous gentleman, who whether ascetic or colourless or jovial, was never the same as other men; who tried to conceal behind his eyes a mysterious purpose against which she instinctively revolted; who ought to have something better to do in the world than coddling the souls of sinless old ladies certain of leaving any court, even the Highest and Ultimate, without a stain on their character; who alone, God's apostle, in the slum of a great city, battling against filth and wickedness and crime would be a heroic figure. She hated the futile, self-imposed joylessness of the place. And yet . . . and yet she was leaving something very beautiful, very precious; something which all the palace hotels and all the casinos of France did not hold. From its eminence above the town the cathedral clad in im-

mortal youth by the morning sun, smiled its farewell message. It cared not whether eyes sought its pavements or its pinnacles. It stood for the grandeur of man made as God, and in it things little and things great had their dwelling-place. It accepted as of wide importance those narrow lives of priests and women which her modernity despised; and under its shadow throve the elemental verities. She was going back into the great world; and yet she wondered whether after all it was a world as great as that of which the calm cathedral was the symbol.

But Twenty, temperamentally and educationally non-mystical, only registering them unconsciously for future use, soon reacts to a new environment. She laughed at herself for not being in the least little bit shocked by the unblushing worldliness of Deauville.

There she met many of her Paris friends, made new English and American ones; bathed, danced, flirted (in her cool ironical way), gambled—ever so little and disdainfully—cast cool eyes on all that the creator of modern Deauville, the great master of the meretricious, had conjured up for the bewitching of a tired, post-war world, and confessed to an ever-smiling trustee that the course of education he had mapped out afforded her prodigious amusement. From Deauville, according to program, they motored to Aix-les-Bains; whence, after a short stay, Moordius finding only a Sleepy Hollow of gouty respectability, all the glory of the place departed, with never a touch of debauching genius to awaken it to its old alluring sinfulness, and the gambling scarcely worth a serious man's attention, carried daughter and ward across France to Biarritz. Valerie complained bitterly. She hated moving. No sooner were they comfortably installed in one spot than a more powerful devil than ever entered

into her father and compelled a change to another. Suzanne, to whom all these pleasure pastures were new and who was willing to be carried through fresh woods every day, found her unreasonable. Valerie was scornful.

"You think he does everything for our pleasure. It's for his own. You don't suppose he's in search of the beauties of Nature, do you? It's the gambling he's after. There's a couple of dozen fools like himself who chase each other's tails round the gambling hells of France in an endless circle. Why they move, God knows. I suppose it's to pick up the small fry they come across en route."

Suzanne shrugged unheeding shoulders. Why shouldn't a man laden with immense responsibilities for most of the year, cast them off for a couple of summer months and amuse himself in his own way? All men (to say nothing of women) had some harmless holiday mania. Some knocked little balls about a field all day and talked about it all night. The bores of the world. Others shut themselves up, unsociable and morose, for hours on end, scowling over bridge-tables. Others, among whom she conscientiously classed herself, danced and danced with never a word spoken or a smile on their faces. All these people took their respective avocations with an offensive seriousness. Moordius took his with an airy gaiety that was delightful. Winning or losing, he treated his game as a sheer pastime. Interrupt a golfer with a humorous quip while he is addressing a ball, and the vehemence of his anathema will only be measured by his breeding; ask a bridge-player at the point of a game when he wants only one doubtful trick to win a double of four spades how he likes your new frock, and the glare in his eyes will blast you to—at any rate till tomorrow morning. But let Suzanne, sitting behind Moordius's chair, when thou-

sands lay in the bank, whisper any laughing irrelevance, and he would uplift his pink smiling face in response, as though his interest in the game were trivial compared to his appreciation of her companionship. He played high, of course. Man of measureless wealth, why shouldn't he? And *beau joueur* always.

Unconsciously she lost sense of values, enveloped in the serene atmosphere which he seemed to create around him. He walked into casinos with the air of royalty and directors and croupiers and valets de pied and chasseurs bowed down before him. An immediate seat at the maximum table became magically his and the companionable chair was provided for Suzanne. At once, too, the whisper went round the crowded gambling room, that Moordius had arrived, and the idlers and casual punters drifted quickly to the table and stood four deep to watch the great game that Moordius would inaugurate. Suzanne, sweeping young and regal by the side of this famous man was thrilled by the universal homage. In the course of much mingling with the heterogeneous throngs around *chemin de fer* tables, she had overheard many wild stories concerning him, some amazing in their absurdity, but none to his discredit. He had broken banks at Monte Carlo a thousand times over; he had more often lost the fortune of a Rothschild. Years ago he had lost everything to a Chicago millionaire at crap dice and had nothing left in the world but the traditional collar stud, which he staked, valued at ten dollars; and from that moment the tide turned and he had won back all he had lost and millions more besides. Sheer foolishness, of course; but still indicating a legendary personality in the great gambling world. She learned too that he possessed the sympathy of the room, of every watching non-playing crowd

that clustered around the table; whereas other notorious high players aroused either indifference or a sentiment of hostility. Among these he was a prince. She shone proudly in her reflected glory.

Had he been gambler and nothing else, like most of the cosmopolitan band of tail-chasers (Valerie's word), whom socially she found either very dull dogs or frankly vulgar, she might not have been affected by the glamour surrounding him. But in all aspects of life he presented to her young eyes an imposing figure. He was the ideal host; the perfect guest. To passing royalty he paid the exact deference demanded by social usage from the citizen of a republic. In spheres remote from gambling he moved with his air of distinction and commanded welcome and respect. With the severe he could talk authoritatively on most subjects; with the frivolous he could be as gay as an air-bubble. His enjoyment of beauty was unlimited—from a sunset cloud to the contour of a woman's cheek. He made a journey a feast of impressions. A day's motoring with him was a liberal education. He went to the tables, it seemed to Suzanne, only when his services were not required for her or Valerie's entertainment. He anticipated their wishes. He conveyed the impression that their happiness was the excuse for his lame existence.

One evening they went to a dinner-dance at Ciboure, the tiny place, thirty kilometres from Biarritz, with a foolish restaurant built on a sea-girt rock. It was the height of the Spanish season. The sleek youth of a Spain enriched by outside war flocked thither in glittering cars accompanied by the profiting beauty of Spain who glittered in jewels that recalled the past splendour of the Empire of Mexico and Peru. A Russian Grand Duke

was there, holding his impoverished court and making a gallant show. There too were the French of Moordius's Paris set patriotically upholding the honour of the tricolour. A few English, attracted by curiosity, out for a jaunt. They dined in the open air, at packed, crowded tables lit with shaded lamps that made the starry sky black, set around a dancing floor. Through the door of the brightly lit restaurant hurried the double file, going and coming, of ant-like waiters. A band discoursed the music in which the post-war world finds its delight. During the brief intervals of quiet, one could hear the swish of the lazy sea against the base of the rock. Dinner, according to the custom of Spain, intolerable to her Eastern neighbours, was not served till ten. The elegant company danced through the meal. The management, seeing no earthly reason to engage an expensive and conscientious chef, for no other purpose than to break his heart, provided cynically haphazard food. Even if they had not danced, the noise of the jazz band would have drowned any flavour that could convey itself to the sense of taste. Suzanne, whose Springtime responded to the specious gaiety, and yet who preserved a French woman's lingering sense of the gastronomic, turned to Moordius with a laugh, as she rose in the middle of her fish, to dance.

"You poor dear martyr, what can I do to make up for your misery?"

She caught the faintest gesture of his head and bent down and he whispered:

"Just be the thing of joy that you are and gladden mine eyes."

She flushed happily and went away on the arm of her partner.

Moordius had a table of eight. A young English baronet and his wife; a young American; a young Frenchman; a young widowed Russian princess. The meal over, tables broke up and the dancing became indiscriminate. Moordius went through a courtesy dance or two with his guests. He danced with Suzanne—a tango.

"You're a wonderful man," she said, yielding to unsuspected rhythm. "How is it that you do everything perfectly?"

"I only do one thing perfectly," said he, "and what that is, my dear, I'm never going to dream of telling you."

"Is that a declaration? Style *Abbé Louis Quinze?"*

"C'est mon secret, petite marquise," he said lightly, and, the music stopping, he took her back to her place.

She danced her fill; but he sat patiently at the table, ever welcoming her transient returns with a gallant word, ever courteous, whiling away the long hours in talk with any chance neighbour.

"You must have been bored to tears," she said, when they prepared to leave.

"With the sight of your happiness before me? For whom do you take me?"

"For the most self-sacrificing and unselfish of men," she said. Then, catching a scornful smile flit across the thin lips of Valerie, who had danced most of the evening, she reddened with indignant pity for the man so maltreated, and her heart leaped to comfort him. All she could do was to slide her hand through his arm and give it a little grateful squeeze. He smiled quick acknowledgment.

"I, at any rate, am grateful," she whispered.

The car on its return journey was filled with sleepy

people. Moordius sat outside by the chauffeur. Suzanne felt a curious new anxiety. Was his coat warm enough in the chill morning air?

"Don't worry yourself," said Valerie bleakly. "He's not like other people."

"I should just think not," said Suzanne; and angrily she passed a rug through the window which she insisted on his taking.

They reached the hotel at four o'clock. While she was undressing, Valerie entered from the adjoining room.

"My father's made fools of many women in his time. To give anything for nothing is not the way of Peter Moordius. He's trying to make a fool of you. Don't let him. You're losing your head, my dear—I see it. Don't. I warn you. I can't do more."

"The gipsy's third warning, I suppose," said Suzanne.

"As you will," said Valerie.

Suzanne flashed on her. "Then let it be the last. If we're to live peacefully together, you and I, you must drop saying these loathsome things about your father. And when you drag me into them, it's abominable. I'm not going to stand it. Once and for all, this has got to be the end."

Fury against Valerie kept her awake till broad daylight. The woman's innuendo was outrageous. She did not know which she resented the more bitterly, the insult to herself or the slander of Moordius. She knew very well what making fools of women meant, not having lived her life under the shelter of the cathedral at Dreuil. Valerie dared classify him with the satyrs, villainous scum of men whom she held in her supreme young disdain. And she dared classify her, Suzanne, with the flabby, cat-brained fools of women who fell ready victims. Out-

rageous was the only word. She would never forgive Valerie, mad or not; never. Valerie had defiled a fair page of her life. She thought of rose-leaves over which a slug had left its track of slime. Hating herself the while, she contrasted Moordius's behaviour with that of the satyrs aforesaid. To them he shone Hyperion. The tentative word, the leering glance, the furtive touch—she knew them all; all the time-worn abominable tricks. She was a child of the new world, knowing (as she thought) all that was to be known of the so-called mysteries hidden from the inane maidenhood of her grandmothers, hidden still from the unimaginable mind of Tante Mathilde. Wrested from the war or not—it mattered little—at any rate, the Tree of Knowledge was the blazon on the shield of the modern Britomart. Good from Evil of course she knew. The shield was a talisman infallible. A breath of the impure clouded it.

In her generous wrath, she canonized the man. It was revolting to set him for a second among these impure breathers. She had come into intimate contact in her young life with three good, true, pure-natured men—her father, poor, dear, funny old Timothy and Moordius. Her father was *hors concours*. Timothy didn't count. Moordius counted enormously.

She could kill Valerie.

She went *da capo* over her life with Moordius since the first evening she had met him at the Carlton, and grew hot with shame at her stupid remark to Timothy, as they drove home: "I like my other guardian better." Why she had made it, save from a feminine impulse to comfort a nose-out-of-jointed Timothy, she did not know. Or had she merely voiced an instinct of self-defence, fearful of being led captive by the grace and charm of the new

controller of her destiny? With youth's impatience she called herself a silly little fool and cast the memory into the limbo of childish things. Timothy was perfect in his way; in the sweetness of his dear old innocent soul she had perfect trust; but comparison between him and Moordius was impossible.

"You're losing your head."

Valerie's words rang through the whirl of her thoughts.

She turned a hot pillow and thumped the cool side into a convenient angle.

"Well, what if I am?" she said, rebelliously. *"Zut!"* Valerie was dismissed. "Why shouldn't I?"

And Dame Nature, ever kind to tired youth, touched her eyelids and smiling inscrutably, sent her into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER X

THE next morning, Moordius's secretary, Dufour, a lean scrimp of a man, a native of the cold and rainy Jura, vague and evasive, waited, as was his wont, in his master's private sitting-room of the Hotel du Palais. As at Deauville and Aix-les-Bains, this was a sacrosanct chamber to which neither Suzanne nor Valerie were admitted. It was as private as the great man's bathroom. He travelled in princely fashion. The ladies had their own *salon* in the magnificent suite on the first floor of the hotel.

At half-past ten, Moordius, after a few hours' sleep, made his appearance, clad in brocaded silk dressing-gown, unshaven, unwashed, unpolished, his unmassaged face lined and pursy beneath the eyes which were dull and unsmiling. He took no notice of Dufour who rose at his entrance, and went to the ordered pile of opened correspondence that lay on the writing-table. He searched for a second or two.

"Where the devil are my spectacles?"

"*Voici,* monsieur," said the secretary, handing him the case.

He fitted on the tortoiseshell-rimmed glasses which gave him the appearance of a flabby pink sea-monster, and pounced at once on a blue telegram-form with its message type-written on the pasted slips. He turned sideways to the secretary a face suddenly shrunken into a hawk's profile.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since half-past eight, monsieur."

"And you have let me sleep with this thing waiting for me?"

"I told Joseph"—Joseph was Moordius's valet—"to wake you, as there were matters of utmost importance for your consideration; but he refused. You did not come home till very late, he said, and you needed sleep, monsieur."

"The faithful dog, eh? Well, I hate faithful dogs. They have no intelligence. If I dismiss Joseph, it's your fault, and you'll have to find him another situation. You had better take him, as your valet, when you return without employment to Paris."

The vague, sallow man turned white. He stammered excuses, pleaded, with tears his ten years' service, his wife and children who would starve in these days of unemployment.

Moordius bent hard blue eyes on him. "What does it matter to me if they starve? There are millions starving in Europe. Half a dozen more or less don't count. What does matter is that after hiding your incapacity for ten years, you've at last betrayed yourself as the triple imbecile that you are. I only employ fools when I can make use of them. A fool that doesn't know what two hours means in the incompetent Postes et Telegraphes system of this infernal country is no use to me. Take down this."

He dictated. The pale-faced Dufour wrote the message in a palsied hand.

"Send it off yourself. God Almighty help you and Joseph if we're too late."

Moordius left to himself, lit a cigar, and sat down to the correspondence on his writing-table. Presently, at a creak of the sitting-room door, he turned his head and

beheld Valerie in peacock-blue kimono embroidered with gold. He bent angry brows.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm not walking in my sleep," Valerie drawled.

"If you're not, you'd better answer my question."

"The answer's obvious. I want to speak to you."

Moordius returned to his papers. "You can go on wanting, my dear Valerie. This room is private. Have the kindness to go away."

Valerie insisted. "I have come to talk to you."

Moordius rose and strode to the door which he opened with an ironical gesture of dismissal.

"You can talk to me another time."

"You will talk with me now," said Valerie, sinking into an arm-chair and regarding him with a miserable smile of hatred.

He slammed the door and stood over her. "What's this folly? I respect your privacy. It's only good manners that you should respect mine."

"That I should play the game, in fact. Men always expect women to do that—to play the losing game against a stronger adversary. Will you never learn that women are not all fools?"

"I hope never," said Moordius. "To do so would be to tread the downward path of error. In the meanwhile may I ask you, politely, to leave me to my work?"

"I've come to talk to you," she repeated. "Seriously."

"Get out," said he, and cursed her.

At the sight of his malignant face she laughed aloud.

"I wish Suzanne Chastel could see you now."

"Suzanne——?"

She flickered a contemptuous gesture. Womanlike she had caught him off his guard and pricked his vanity.

"Look in the glass." She sprang suddenly forward in her chair. "Yes. That's what I've broken the rule for," she said quickly. "To talk to you about Suzanne. What are you proposing to do with her? Debauch her, like so many others?"

Moordius recovered himself, and the smile on his lips and in his eyes was evil.

"Your remark is somewhat indelicate, my dear Valerie."

"I meant it to be. There's not much sentiment between you and me, is there, although you're my father? You knocked all that out of me long ago. So I ask you again. Why are you making that girl fall in love with you? Is it herself or her money or what?"

Moordius drew himself up and folded his dressing-gowned arms in great dignity.

"You must be out of your mind to ask me such questions. There are limits to permissible eccentricity."

He moved to his writing-table and touched one of the electric bell-pushes on the white movable tablet. The whirr of the bell sounded close by, long and clear.

"Will you go?" he asked.

"No," said Valerie.

He shrugged his shoulders. From the bedroom came Joseph, a pallid, hard-eyed man, with expressionless features. Moordius sat down to his writing-table and took up a letter.

"Will you conduct Madame to her room. She is not quite well this morning."

Valerie lay back in her chair, white at the insult, yet resolved to carry the scene through.

"My father is mistaken, Joseph. My faintness has gone. I can get to my room by myself. You can go."

"Very well, Madame."

"Do what I tell you, Joseph," came the voice from the writing-table.

Joseph approached and touched her arm in mute offer of assistance. She sprang haughtily to her feet. Moordius turned round and with a nod dismissed the man. Valerie waited for the click of the closed door and flashed out in anger:

"How dare you let that beast lay hands on me?"

Moordius only replied: "Aren't you going now? I can easily bring him back. Joseph's a person of limited intelligence, but he is scrupulous in the carrying out of orders. I'm sorry, my dear Valerie, but I must get rid of you somehow, as I must attend to my correspondence. If you won't go out, you must be carried out."

"You don't dare." She stood before him rigid, with the glint of diamonds in the pupils of her dark eyes. "I should scream and scream and Suzanne would come in and learn exactly what you are."

"No," said Moordius, smiling. "There you are wrong. She would learn exactly what you are. I should have to tell her the truth."

"The truth? You tell her the truth?" She laughed a bit shakily.

He held up his white hand. "She knows it more or less already. And the more you screamed and struggled, the more mad would she believe you to be."

"Mad?" She pressed a hand to her bosom. "What do you mean?"

"My language is plain. My dear child," said he, "has your behaviour, since Miss Chastel joined us, been that of a normal daughter towards an indulgent father? It has been that of a woman with a diseased brain. How

else could any one account for it? Hasn't it occurred to you that I must give some explanation? You may be sure that to do so has been infinitely painful to me. Mad? Yes, my dear Valerie. The unhappy word is out."

Her face was a mask of tragic horror. She had nursed resentment of a young lifetime's bitter wrongs and subtle cruelties, and was now gradually satiating her vengeance in display of her passionate hatred. She lived for it. She loved to see him wince at her shafts when retort would only be self-betrayal. But till this moment, she had never dreamed of the possibility of his bland defence. Even now it was incredible.

"You are vile enough to tell people I'm mad?"

"Considerate enough, my dear, to say that sorrow has caused a slight infirmity of reason. Oh, I assure you"—his face was gradually assuming its air of benevolence—"I really assure you that I set about it in the most delicate way in the world."

"My God!" she cried brokenly. "That's the last outrage."

"By no means, my dear," said he.

She turned again on him. "And suppose I told my story. The whole abominable story?"

"No one would believe you. 'Poor dear,' folks would say. 'Her brain is touched. The death of her husband——' "

She sank wearily into a chair.

"I wish I were dead too," she said dejectedly.

"Alas! The vanity of human wishes, my dear. The difference between the wish and the will! You have no will to die and so the wish is futile. You're as strong as a horse. You'll live to a hundred." He took up the

cigar which he had put down in his impatience to open the door for her. It had gone out and he threw it into the grate. "You've made me waste my morning and an irreplaceable cigar," said he, selecting another from a box. "Is that a sane proceeding on the part of a daughter? Of course," he continued after he had lit it, while she sat looking hauntedly in front of her, "if this life of luxury and ease is distasteful to you, why submit to it? Why wish for death, which must be very cold and clammy and generally unpleasant, when there's all of life in front of you? Why not go out, through wide open gates, into the vast and palpitating world?"

She turned a tortured face. "What should I live upon? Would you refund my husband's fortune? Would you even make me an allowance?"

"No," he smiled. "Oh, no. We've had all this foolishness out before. It may be a trifle selfish on my part, but I do want my widowed daughter to live with me and keep my house. Refund? Your poor dear Edward rushed down to his ruin like any little silly pig of Gadara, as I've often told you. He ought to have been a poet or a musician, played the harp, as most certainly he's doing now, dear fellow, or been a cardinal or a prime minister, or anything irresponsible like that. But fate made him a stockbroker and vanity a financier. He knew as much of finance as a hippopotamus of cubism. My warnings were of no avail. He lost his fortune."

"To you."

"Another delusion," said he, smiling sadly, all his old benevolent self again. "That little touch of the brain which makes me so wretchedly unhappy. We needn't discuss the matter further. It's too painful. We come to the allowance. I've already said no. That's ended.

Still, you're not a prisoner. You're as free as any bird that flies. You can leave me tomorrow if you will. Haven't you wit enough and beauty of a certain kind to earn your own living? There are even potential husbands *de par le monde*—Moordius's daughter——"

"His penniless daughter? What *dot* would I bring?"

"Fathers in France are not expected to give two dowries to the same daughter. You underestimate your personal charms. But apart from that, why not go out into the world and work honestly? There are thousands of careers open to women nowadays. School-teaching, governessing, type-writing, play-acting, selling things in shops, painting little pictures, selling automobiles on commission, medicine, law, driving taxicabs—one could go on infinitely. A lady slaughterer in an abattoir would make a world sensation. Go forth, my child, and follow the dictates of your modern instincts, and a father's blessing be upon you."

The door opened, and the lean Dufour appeared, his errand accomplished.

"I am sorry——" he began, apologetically.

Moordius beckoned affably. "No, no. Come in. Madame was only whiling away my half-hour of enforced idleness. Thank you so much, Valerie. Now I must obey the stern call of duty. We meet at twelve-thirty *chez* Miramare for *apéritifs* and luscious trifles. And, my dearest, don't forget to tell the concierge to get us good seats for the bull-fight at Bayonne on Sunday."

She passed out with death in her heart. Once more he had proved her to be no match for him.

Valerie excused herself from attendance at the bull-fight. Her usual headache. Moordius exhibited his

usual paternal concern and sympathized with the martyr whose ill-health so often interfered with her enjoyment.

"And my enjoyment too," he said plaintively. "For one's pleasure is always enhanced by that of another."

"I abominate bull-fights," said Valerie.

Moordius glanced at Suzanne, as who should say: "Listen to this sweet Goddess of Unreason," and sipped his coffee.

They were sitting in the buzzing hotel lounge of what was once the seaside palace of Napoleon and Eugenie. A discreet band played Dvorak's "Humoreske" to the sleek, post-prandial crowd.

"If Suzanne enjoys the beastly spectacle I shall be greatly surprised," Valerie added.

"You will enjoy it, my dear Suzanne," said Moordius, "if you'll only allow yourself to appreciate the science of the game. There's an astonishing unity in mundane manifestations. In three spheres taken at random—banking, love, and bull-fighting, the essential principle is discount. Even in accepting the most perfect lover, you must discount a host of human infirmities. In bull-fighting, you must discount certain unpleasantnesses inevitable to the most beautiful exhibition of skill devised by the race of man."

"I'm going," said Suzanne, "because it's a world-wide institution, and to have seen a bull-fight once is part of one's education. Then one can talk with some authority. If it's too horrid one can always come away."

"At any moment," said Moordius.

"You try to tear away an *aficionado* from a bull-fight and he'll want to murder you," said Valerie.

"What's an *aficionado?*"

"The Spanish term for an amateur of the sport," Moor-

dius answered. "It pleases Valerie to give me that designation. Believe me, I don't deserve it."

Suzanne drove off with Moordius in gay spirits, secretly glad to be relieved of Valerie's gloomy presence. To be always discounting (to use Moordius's figure) an inseparable companion's melancholia is a wearisome employment. They whirled along the straight even road, through the shimmering afternoon of dust and sunshine, through the great sandy plain sentinelled by the shadowy mountains of the Pyrenees in the vast distance, between green avenues, past red-roofed white houses with turrets and loggias, smiling amid feathery tamarisks, villas hidden deep in green parks, white café exteriors swarming with swarthy Basques, men in little black berets and brightly scarved girls, past the slower procession of open cabs, ancient carrioles, carts, pedestrians, all bound for the Mecca of the day.

The red-brick arena, in waste land off the road, stood suddenly out before Suzanne's eyes, hard and ugly, repellent yet fascinating, a hard shell-foil to the romance within. When they alighted from the car and walked across the withered grass and lost perspective of the building, she realized the conventional setting of the last act of "Carmen." There were the same little poky entrances in the sheer brick, each designated by a letter, the same posters announcing the names of the matadors and the prices of seats according to sun or shade. The same chorus folk hung vaguely about.

They stopped at an insignificant hole where Moordius showed his tickets. She followed him up a steep staircase, and in an instant the vast amphitheatre burst into her view. It was astonishingly like all the pictures she had seen. The shadow of the western half of the build-

ing cut straight down the tiers and across the empty red palisaded arena. They sat in a central box, on chairs, half-way up in the Ombre, beneath the President's box. The mass of the vast audience sat in tier above tier on the stone steps, packed in a quivering swelter of agitation; especially in the hemisphere of sun, an indistinguishable medley of prevailing white splashed here and there with the gay colours of women's parasols and head-dresses, and all a-flutter with infinite fans and the fanning straw hats of men.

Down there, to the left, so close, it seemed, that she could hit it with a stone, was a door in the red palisade labelled "Toril" in great characters. And above the label was a placard with the name of a man, "Barello." This was the matador who should engage the first bull—for the classical six were to be slaughtered that day. And through the "Toril" door the bull would be let loose.

Moordius looked admiringly at the girl's flushed cheeks and the expectant eyes that flashed round the amphitheatre. Here was feminine youth, modern, impatient of restraint, disdainful of prejudice, responsive to impression; fiercely virgin in the unawakened chords of her heart, yet contemptuously familiar with the theoretic bases of passion and of life; all was known and yet all was unknown; the fine flower of post-war maidenhood; possessing moreover the fascination of her ancestry, vehement compound of Latin swiftness and English calmer certainty. . . .

His thoughts wandered as, unknown to her, he searched her face. . . . A wonderful race those English. A tiny shaft of resentment flickered through the heart of the hybrid. Their damned dominance! They say nothing. They pretend to do nothing. They yield the credit of

their Mighty Empire to Scotch, Welsh, Irish, Australians, Canadians, Fiji Islanders. . . . They applaud the fervent bagpipes, they smile indulgently at Welsh Eisteddfod; until recently the Irish have been far more popular in England than the English. When Canadian troops marched through an English country town, patriotically singing "We are Ca-na-di-ans," the inhabitants cheered them without prejudice. If any Tommy during the war had noisily proclaimed himself to be English he would have been solemnly court-martialled and sent to a lunatic asylum.

What was she? English or Latin? It mattered vastly to him. To get to the heart of the English had ever been his problem. There had never been any bagpiping, harping, or shillelaghing among them. He remembered dining at a great London hotel in 1916, a day or two after the Dublin riots. The alien orchestra played the air of an imbecile song entitled "A Little Bit of Heaven" —the celestial scrap being the country which threatened to be our deadliest enemy—and the incomprehensible English audience demanded an encore. How could one begin to think of the mentality of such a nation? Their very war-song was "Tipperary." And yet, as Moordius knew, England, grateful of course for extraneous aid, carried the war on her own shoulders, supreme, modestly contemptuous of distribution of meed.

Yes. That English blood in her. The pure English of old Joe Grabbiter, not over reputable personally, yet utterly English in his debased national qualities. The Latins were calculable, once one had grasped the secret of the subtle workings of their minds; to deal with them was an intricate game, an intellectual delight. The English always deceived you by doing the obvious, the

amazing and often impossible obvious. A baffling race. He knew that on her Latin side he had caught her. To all the Latin things which he had provided she had responded like an untouched piano to the chord of a violin. But deep down in her lay that confounded English incomprehensible self-sufficiency. . . . The bull-fight was a test.

On the stroke of four the orchestra of French hunting horns blew the *hal lali*. Doors in the red palisade were thrown open, and the two Alguazils in eighteenth-century black and gold, mounted on superb black horses, crossed the arena and waved their sugar-loaf hats in salute of the President on the upper tier. The purse containing the key of the Toril, thrown by the President, was gallantly caught by the senior Alguazil. Then came the proud procession of the quadrillas, matadors, banderilleros, picadores, and the team of mules, caparisoned with gay ribbons and bells: the two matadors in gold, the banderilleros in silver. Moordius explained rapidly. This was Barello, who would kill the first bull; that was Pequito, who would alternate with him. The Latin in Suzanne leaped breathless to the arrogant spectacle.

The procession passed through the doors. The banderilleros lounged against the barrier, so that the arena appeared deserted. There was a moment's suspense. Suzanne could hear her heart beat. The gate of the Toril opened and the bull, head and tail in the air, dashed from darkness and silence into the dazzling trap of sunshine and the world of white faces and the innumerable murmurings of hereditary foes. He sniffed and pawed. A little silver thing slid from the barrier and flaunted a purple cloak. The bull charged, swept away the cloak on his horns, dashed it off impatiently and sped to the

silver thing who, vaulting over the barrier, eluded him by the fraction of a second. Another banderillero came with an orange cape. The bull charged, missed the swiftly swept cloth and blundered on, while the silver thing, almost languidly lounged to the barrier. The air thundered peals of applause. Suzanne locked her hands convulsively together. The skill and daring were incredible. Again the bull charged another banderillero. There was play of astounding audacity and nimbleness. When she recovered from her excitement over the pass, she became aware of two men on horses, the picadores, with long lances; the horses, old, bony, decrepit, blindfolded over one eye.

Moordius had explained to her the science of the game. No man armed with a sword could kill a bull so long as the bull could lift his head to toss. His tossing power depended on the amazing muscle of his neck. This ligament had to be pricked—practically a painless process—so as to render it impotent. The lances of the picadores, shielded an inch from the point, served this purpose. Now, the thrust must be delivered from some point above the bull's shoulders, to which no man on foot could attain. Thus—it followed logically—the man must be mounted on a horse. It would be absurd to submit the lives of good horses to the risks of the maddened bull; wherefore old horses, whose day of drudgery was done, were chosen for this honourable end to their useful career.

She had imagined, however, that the rider would allow the horse to make some gallant show. He might escape, like the silver men, from the cruel horns. But the picador just in front of her stood like a statue. The bull on the other side of the arena, lured across by the ever-elusive cape and the agile thrust of the banderillero, stood

for a second in impotent rage. Then head down he went for the blindfolded horse, slowly, deliberately, cruelly. And while he lifted the horse in the air, the picador jabbed his lance-point home. The bull lifted horse and man against the barrier, until the man disengaging his feet from the stirrup, was seized by common red-capped attendants and dragged over into safety. The horse fell. A banderillero with a cape lured the bull away. . . .

The horse kicked and his bowels gushed out. Red-capped men in canvas overalls issued from shelters by the barrier and dragged the horse to his feet. He stood with his entrails hanging out.

Suzanne, white, trembling, clutched Moordius's arm.

"This is too loathsome, too utterly abominable. I never imagined anything like this. Why did you bring me?"

For a moment or two he seemed unconscious of her touch or voice or presence. The thousands of eyes of the amphitheatre were concentrated on the bull doing silly, brutish, bullish things on the far side. But Moordius's eyes seemed to Suzanne to be held by the extra-bowelled horse, who, no sooner on his feet, fell down again in agony. And the man's eyes seemed to be glazed and his curiously little mouth to be set as a rictus, a strange moistness to appear at the corners of his lips. It was all the matter of a second or two. He turned suddenly, with his benevolent smile.

"If you feel faint, we can go."

"It is my soul and not my body that is sick," said Suzanne.

"That's even worse," he smiled. "Come."

"I'll see the horror through," said Suzanne.

She was resolved he should not treat her with a man's

indulgent contempt for a silly woman. Whatever were the relations decreed between Moordius and herself in the future, she knew instinctively that they must meet on equal terms. Besides, before no man would she show feminine weakness. She would sit out the foul spectacle, until the bull was killed; then she would be entitled to express a reasoned judgment.

"But why—if it hurts you?" he asked.

"Never mind," she replied shortly. "Look, there's another poor brute down."

So she baffled him. Yes, perhaps after all it was the incomprehensible English in her.

Meanwhile four horses were disembowelled. One who could not be led out lay horribly dead, and the red-capped men strewed sawdust perfunctorily over that which was most unpleasant. Now the bull, unable to raise his head, became the sport of the banderilleros. With excessive daring and exquisite skill a little man in silver, poising two darts delicately between his fingers awaited the charge, planted the darts in the bull's shoulder and skipped magically aside. Six darts spirally bound in gay ribbons were thus planted. One man missing his aim and having to run for his life and vault over the barrier, the brave audience shrieked and howled and whistled their scorn. The bull became a sticky mess of blood.

Then came forward Barello, the gold-embroidered matador, with red cape and hidden sword and he played the bull, aided by the banderilleros. When he judged the streaming brute sufficiently tired, he advanced to the barrier, and looking up at the President's box asked for permission to kill the bull. He had a handsome swaggering peasant's face; a sinewy animal. Suzanne wondered by how many thousand silly animal little Carmens he

was adored. Standing there, tall and brave, in his insolent pride, he reminded her of the bull as he had first flashed into the arena, before he had been robbed of his majestic strength. Behind him the bull with the darts sticking out of his reeking shoulders was kept occupied by the capes of the banderilleros at which he made little head-downward charges.

Permission given to kill, Barello tossed his cap into the amphitheatre and went forth to accomplish his task. After various charges at the red cape the bull was manœuvred into position, head lowered, front feet together, facing the matador. A swift thrust with the sword. A charge of the bull, the hilt of the sword sticking up among the darts, a race for safety covered by the distracting cape of a banderillero. Yells and execrations on the matador's clumsiness from the twenty thousand brave spectators.

Another manœuvre, monotonously scientific, for position. Again the swift thrust. This time the sword had gone home. The audience screeched their delight. The man in gold and the men in silver stood round the gory bull, while the black life-blood gushed beastily through mouth and nostrils. The immense auditorium went frantic with joy. Presently the brute fell on his knees, after the manner of his kind, and rolled over. An indistinguished member of the quadrilla, dignified by the sonorous title of puntillero, knelt down and with a poignard gave him the *coup de grâce*. Amid wild frenzy of applause Barello and his toreros retired. The gaily caparisoned team of mules dragged off the bodies of the bull and the dead horse. The red-capped men came and strewed sawdust over the bloodstains. The heavy summer air stank of blood.

"I'll go now, if you don't mind," said Suzanne.

"As you will, my dear Suzanne," said he. "But remember—*ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.* It's always the way. Stay on for two or three more bulls and you'll become a convert to the most fascinating sport in the world."

"You can stay—why not? I wouldn't for the world interfere in your enjoyment. But I'm going back to Biarritz, if you'll put me in the car. I'll send it back for you."

He rose with her and said suavely as they descended the steep narrow stairs:

"No. I've had enough. Your English instinct is right. It has its brutal side."

They found the car with difficulty—for the police had resolved a crowd's instinctive order into official chaos—somewhere near the door of the shambles. They drove off slowly through the park of automobiles in the sickening stench of blood.

"I know nothing about my English instinct," she said after a span of silence. "My country is France. The France for which my father gave his life. And now I am ashamed of it. Ashamed. Ashamed——"

She spoke in French, vehemently, passionately, flooding her pink and ever so little disconcerted companion with her fierce and most righteous indignation. With Spain she had nothing to do; no more than with Central African tribes who danced round fires whereon human flesh was being cooked. In the olden times, yes; when the Cid and the rest of them fought the bull single-handed. It was inconceivably silly. But it was man against savage beast. Those were times when Spain was virile. Modern bull-fighting was instituted when the name of deca-

dent Spain was as mud among nations. Let Spain have her degenerate beastliness if she wanted it. But that France—her France—the France that for centuries has inspired with her exquisite civilization the world that fought for her freedom, the France that only yesterday had said at Verdun *"on ne passera pas,"* should countenance and encourage this filthy and damnable spectacle passed her comprehension, as it passes that of every one of her non-Latin lovers whom she is blind enough not to recognize as legion.

Spain might do as she liked. What did it matter to her, half French, half English? If it pleased Spain to brutalize her idle people with the disgusting delight of horses' entrails and the streaming blood of a tortured bull, and the ripped open bowels of a vain, ignorant, royally paid desperado, let her wallow in the mire of her foul ecstasy. But France was France; and there lay the taint of this abomination in a band, as it were, of miasmic vapour from Bayonne to Nîmes.

And the French Government looked comfortably on, the State railways ran special trains to bull-fights, which, by the way, were illegal. The promoters were hauled up at once for contravention of the law, and the majesty of the law thundered at them and fined them twenty francs.

"It's the dirtiest stain that has ever been on our proud and beautiful flag!"

Moordius smiled inwardly. The voice was the voice of France, impetuous in utterance, exaggerated in its picturesque choice of words; but the sentiment was the sentiment of that Puritan England which he hated and feared. Now that he had put the Latin and English in her to the great test, he was surer of his ground.

"My dear Suzanne," said he, with a delicate touch on

her wrist, "behold me converted. I'll never go to a bull-fight again without asking your permission. I swear it."

She broke into English. "Don't you agree with me that it's loathsome and degrading?"

"You have the gift," said he, "of throwing on things the light of the Absolute."

CHAPTER XI

THE summer yielded to autumn. The call of Paris was felt in the air. Since the bull-fight, little occurred to mark a change in the relations of the queer trio. Between Valerie and Suzanne there existed a semi-affectionate civility. They bought hats together and walked in the house of Frippery as friends. In their more intimate talks over *tête-à-tête* meals and at casual meetings during the day, the name of Moordius was practically taboo. Valerie having given her warnings was powerless to do more; she shrugged tired and somewhat terrified shoulders; Suzanne pitied her for one whose mind, in one direction, had gone distraught. Between Moordius and Suzanne the ties of mutual sympathy insensibly grew stronger. After public renunciation of *tauromachie,* gracefully made among a circle of Spanish friends in the supper room of the Casino, Moordius left her with the impression that her influence had prevailed. The question was never raised again. The horror was buried. He became a keen patron of pelota, one of the most perfect of the world's ball games, and she, alive to grace and virility, shared his clean enthusiasm. In his subtle fashion, he gave her girlish mind to understand him as her more than devoted servant. His flattery was enveloped in the saving grace of the paternal smile. He craved his little favours with an exquisite anxiety undreamed of in the philosophy of the young men fluttering around Suzanne.

At last, in her direct fashion, she attacked his gambling. Rumour that ever followed the great gambler accredited

(or discredited) him with enormous losses. Whispers were abroad—and they reached Suzanne—of millions of francs lost at Deauville, Aix-les-Bains, and here at Biarritz, where most nights he sat centrally at baccarat and played *banque ouverte*. Now to play *banque ouverte* at baccarat is to assume the position of the limitless bank of the Casino of Monte Carlo—without those odds in favour of the bank which secure the fortune of that humorously entitled Bathing Establishment and the revenue of a principality. On the contrary, the odds, the percentage levied on the bank and stuck down the little slot in the table, which is divided between the promoters of the Casino, the municipality and the French Government, were against him. The many tongues of rumour, for once, spoke unanimous truth. Suzanne sitting in her high chair behind him, screened by a silken rope from the pressure of the four deep crowd around the table, saw enormous sums disappear before her eyes. It seemed so stupid, although, debonair, he treated his losses lightly as one who had squandered gaily a few francs on the imbecile La Boule in the outer hall.

She had danced. She had supped, with Valerie and friends. Valerie had gone home saying that the milk and the lark and the worms would greet her father on the doorstep of the hotel. But Suzanne had stayed behind. The eternal protective instinct in woman drew her through the entrance to the Salle de Baccara, guarded by vague men in dinner jackets who have nothing on God's earth to do but sit and watch—it must be a hideous, soul-destroying trade—and by liveried footmen who have nothing on God's earth to do but open and shut, interminably opening and shutting doors—and through the thronged rooms, airless, heavy with the odour of rank

human breath, human bodies, violent perfumes, the smoke of cigarettes and cigars which hovered in a blue haze above the mephitic, stupefying atmosphere in which the players, sitting and standing round the twenty tables played for any stake from the humble white five-francs counter to the maximum of a thousand louis—two elastic bound bundles of ten thousand francs—through the narrow spaces between crowded tables to the great table of baccarat where Moordius sat holding *banque ouverte*. A bald-headed, polite official welcomed her. A snap of finger and thumb brought a liveried footman with a chair. The protecting silken rope was unhooked. She took her place behind Moordius.

"What luck?"

He turned round, pink and blue, all smiles.

"If only these were the poor and needy, sufferers from the war, I should be the happiest man on earth."

The croupier snarled raucously.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs. On peut faire."

Moordius dealt from the shoe. One card to the right, one to the left, one to himself. One to the right, one to the left, one to himself. The holder of the hand on the right tableau threw down a nine. The holder on the left asked for a card. Moordius turned up his cards, a four and a six. He threw a card, a five, to the left tableau; drew one for himself—a king. Baccarat. The left showed a point of two. The masses of *mille* notes and the piles of blue five-louis plaques in front of the croupier and the bundles that Moordius threw on the table disappeared like sparks up a chimney.

The croupier looked enquiringly.

"Monsieur?"

It was for Moordius to say whether he would reconstitute the bank or not.

Suzanne swiftly bent forward and spoke in French:

"No. You've lost enough tonight, Moordius. It is idiotic. Stop. Do it for me."

He shook his head at the croupier who began his professional cry: *"La Banque est aux enchères. Qui veut La Banque?* But no one dared follow the immensity of an open bank. Gamblers are peculiarly sensitive to anti-climax. The standing punt and onlookers drifted away. The table rose. Moordius vacated his chair, passed through the respectfully lifted rope barrier with Suzanne, his arm, in discreet protection hovering round but not touching her.

"Is there anything I would not do for you, Suzanne?" She half turned her proud head.

"Give up this gambling altogether."

"Ah!"

As usual he smiled and waved his white hand. And as they made their way through the rooms:

"Why so cruel as to rob me of this trivial amusement?"

"I can't see where the fun of supporting the rich and the undeserving comes in."

"Let us discuss the matter," said he blandly, "in God's sweet air."

They threaded their way through the congested corridors off the dancing rooms whence came the blare of tunes now threadbare on the longest circuit of the world from San Francisco to Tokio, another gust of vitiated air, and up the stairs to the entrance. He obtained and fitted her wrap.

"For goodness sake let us walk," she said.

A chasseur took a message of dismissal to the car waiting in the long decorous line. They struck across the square flooded in moonlight and turned up a by-street into the Avenue du Palais.

"Now," said he, "what saith Egeria?"

"One may pay too much both in health and money for one's trivial amusements."

"Money? Bah!" He was contemptuous. "Health? I am as robust as I was twenty years ago. As soon as my head touches the pillow I fall asleep like a child of nine."

"There's also such a thing as individuality—personality—whatever you like to call it——" she had thought much over what she had now found opportunity to say—"and devoting one's life to an utterly stupid thing can't be good for that. For a man who can afford it to gamble now and then—it's a distraction like any other—but to go at it day after day for months is a different matter. Gambling as you and these half-dozen notorious maniacs do is a silly business. At first I thought it rather splendid. Now I don't."

"You are frank," said he.

"I'm that or nothing—especially when I care for people."

"Do you then care for me so much, Suzanne?" he asked in his soft voice.

It was late. The whisper carried in the still, deserted street. She ignored the sentiment, and answered directly.

"I care enough for you to hate your reputation being called in question."

"My reputation?" His tone was swift and sharp.

"If you want to have it—this is what I overheard

people saying: 'Moordius is *décavé*, broke, and is gambling away the millions of his bank.' "

He took her arm outside the soft cloak.

"My dear, people who grub louis can't think in terms of *mille* notes," he said, using the figure of speech which had so greatly revolutionized Timothy's philosophy of life. "All that you have said is by the way—save in one respect. My high play offends you, Suzanne, or rather it offends the eternal delicacies and uprightnesses and what-not which you inherit from your English ancestry. Isn't it so?"

"More or less," she replied stoutly. "Anyway I hate this gambling now." They walked a few steps in silence. Then she swung her head round. "I know I've no business to talk to you like this. But you asked for it," she said defiantly. "You challenged me. Was there anything you wouldn't do for me? You were either talking polite rubbish, or you were serious. Which was it?"

"I was serious, Suzanne."

"Very well, then. Stop gambling."

"I will," said Moordius. "Tonight I have played my last stake at Biarritz. Is her goodness-ship satisfied?"

"Oh!" she laughed, "I'm the incarnation of common sense. Besides, you must not take me too literally. You can play boule." Her sense of humour got the better of her and she laughed outright. "It would be lovely to see you, the Great Moordius, standing like the Peri outside the gates of Paradise and putting one franc *jetons* on numbers. Then indeed there would be a run on Moordius & Compagnie. No. I don't think you'll be even allowed boule."

They reached the great gates of the Hotel du Palais, once the great gates of a real Imperial Palace, and went

up the drive towards the mass of the building silvered in the moonlight. A faint warm wind stirred the feathery tamarisks so that they seemed to join in the whispering of fairy welcomes.

Said Moordius: "Any more behests, my dear? On such a night as this—etcetera, etcetera——"

She took a full breath of the keen air. It was like a breath of life. Her young pulses reacted to the invigoration.

"It is lovely. It's more than lovely. I want nothing more than to feel that I'm living. Isn't it wonderful to be really alive?"

"Dryad!" said he.

The word pleased her. But it also pleased her mood, rendered ever so little fantastic by the newly awakened sense of power over the man and by his ever-graceful homage, to put in protest.

"Dryads were shy. They melted into their elemental trees when Pan and the rest of them were about. I'm too modern. I can't melt. I wouldn't if I could."

"I understand," said he. "You prefer to meet Pan face to face and look him straight between the eyes."

"Common sense again," she laughed. "Then one can say, 'I don't like the shape of your feet or the twist of your little horns. Besides, go and get shaved; hide your tail.' What would the poor fellow have to say for himself after that? Oh, I could tell off Pan in a hundred ways."

He yielded astutely to her mood and carried on the gay talk. The night-porter admitted them, took them up in the lift to their floor. They trod softly down the mysterious stillness of the dimly lighted corridor. At her bedroom door they halted. He kissed her hand.

"My dear," said he, "may you never have a servant less devoted."

Moordius kept his promise. He cut his stay at Biarritz short by some ten days. The great car took them by easy stages to Paris a little after the middle of September, and they took up again the life in the Avenue Gabriel. But only for a short while as far as Suzanne was concerned. Old Aunt Mathilde in Dreuil fell ill. Fat and comfortable Aunt Germaine's letter of despair could not be ignored. To the little town of the great cathedral overshadowing so many timorous existences, and baffling the rebellious instincts of Clémence Mercadet, she went post-haste. Aunt Mathilde, seized with pneumonia, lay in imminent danger of death. The little gloomy house, haunted at all hours of the day by faded forms in black skirts or black cassocks, felt like a mausoleum already prepared. The immense coif of the nun-nurse fluttering about the dark passages had the air of a white death-moth.

"Why not get all the sunshine and air we can into the place?" asked Suzanne.

"*Ma chérie,*" said Aunt Germaine, in mild rebuke, "why not play merry tunes on the piano?"

Poor Aunt Mathilde's last illness was a dismal time. The period between death and funeral was more dismal still. Suzanne, having telegraphed to Paris for the mourning garments at which old Joe Grabbiter had taken such umbrage, fell unnoticed into the environment of woe. To the funeral came from all parts of France the *ban* and *arrière ban* of relations, most of whom she had never met before. They overwhelmed her with dreary politeness, half afraid, wholly envious of the semi-English

daughter of Colonel Chastel, heiress of English millions.

There was a Victor Chastel, her father's cousin, iron master of Saint-Etienne, and his wife delicate and aristocratic—he had taken her, dowerless, because it was a love match, out of a mildewed family mansion in the Faubourg Saint-Germain—and their son Gaspard, needy and cynical, ultra modern, who had gone through the war in the service of the hospitals, and wrote poetry for a heliotrope-covered review, denied the existence of ante-Stravinsky music and proclaimed Marcel Proust as the only novelist of all time. In the eyes of Monsieur and Madame Chastel, Suzanne with her millions was the ideal bride for Gaspard. The second cousins were made for each other. Gaspard alive to material things, paid immediate court to Suzanne, observing all the discretion due to a house of mourning. He was the only gleam of brightness for Suzanne that fell athwart the gloom of Dreuil. Aunt Germaine, in spite of her grief, felt herself bound for the sake of the family to urge Gaspard's suit. Suzanne was definite, her eyes clear, her voice gently mocking.

"My dear aunt, if you gave him to me as a pet in a cage, I'd have to hang him outside the window."

"*Tu dis?*" questioned Aunt Germaine, unable to grasp the devastating criticism of the modern *jeune fille bien élevée.*

Suzanne mildly repeated her words.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Aunt Germaine.

And so gently and tactfully are matters matrimonial managed in France, that the Victor Chastels faded gently away from Dreuil on the morrow, and only a far-distant cousin, Stephanie Gouraud, a plump and penniless war-

widow remained to take charge of Aunt Germaine in the little dark house.

"I'll bring gaiety into it," she said to Suzanne.

The pathetic valiancy of the little adipose woman brought tears to Suzanne's eyes.

They went to the notary and learned the terms of Aunt Mathilde's will. To Suzanne were bequeathed a manuscript book of cookery recipes and a rosary blessed by Pope Pius the Ninth.

During this visit of duty and affection, Suzanne missed a week of Timothy in Paris. This time Timothy of the higher standard was persuaded by a humorously bantering Moordius to accept the hospitality of a spare room in the apartment of the Avenue Gabriel.

"Of course, my dear boy, if you want to lead what the Englishman's idea is of the gay night life of Paris—I won't press my invitation."

"Good God!" cried Timothy aghast. "Such a thing never entered my head."

"It will enter the head of any woman of the world like my daughter Valerie."

Timothy again appealed to the Deity. Had such horrible suspicions of his dissolute proclivities occurred to Valerie and Suzanne during his former visit?

"Who knows what passes through the minds of women?" said Moordius. "Yet broadly speaking, be clear and open and they'll think the best. A touch of mystery about you and they'll think the worst. Especially a woman like Valerie. I should like you to know her better. Give her no occasion for prejudice and you'll find her a remarkable personality."

So Timothy, shrinking from unutterable conjecture in the minds of pure women, reluctantly yielded to Moordius's arguments; and Moordius professing to be an exceedingly busy man and only able to devote a certain number of hours to Timothy's instruction in bank affairs during the day and to Timothy's entertainment during the evening, Valerie, out of common courtesy had to occupy herself with their shy and awkward guest. At first they were separated by the original cloud of mutual prejudice; he being to her but the dull fool, her father's dupe; she to him, with his unique knowledge of her parentage, an unsympathetic figure of unnatural drama.

It was on the second evening after his arrival that they were thrown together alone for the first time. A telephone call had summoned Moordius from table towards the end of dinner; he had returned distressfully apologetic. The Cavaliere Belloro, the great Italian financier, had just arrived in Paris and craved an immediate interview on affairs of immeasurable importance. Would they excuse him from attendance in the box that awaited them at the theatre? He commended their dear Timothy to Valerie's graciousness and made the exit of the perfect host and the affectionate father.

"Do you really want to see this silly play?" asked Valerie, when they drifted into the drawing-room.

"I shouldn't know whether it was silly or not," said Timothy, "because I shouldn't understand a word of it."

"Then honestly you'd rather not go?"

"I'm entirely in your hands," said he.

She pressed her question. Would he never be direct? She pressed it so far that his courteous soul was convinced of her sincerity. He laughed.

"To tell you the truth," said he, "I've never made

head or tail of a French play in all my life, and I always go away angry with myself for being such a fool."

"Thank goodness we're spared one particular brand of boredom," she said. "What other shall we try?"

"I'm quite contented to sit here," said he.

"Until you're bored with my society?"

"No. Until you're bored with mine."

He was rather pleased with himself. It was a gallant repartee. The sort of quick, suave thing that Moordius would have said.

"A contest of mutual endurance, then?"

"A contest between your endurance and my enjoyment."

She drew a cigarette from her case. "Will you give me a light?"

He sprang to his feet and fumbled in his pocket for a box of matches. And after she had lit her cigarette, lounging in the corner of her favourite couch beneath the shaded standard lamp, she said:

"It's only through flashes like that that I realize what a wonderful man my father must be."

He did not follow. She said with a laugh: "Never mind, it was one of those foolish things one oughtn't to have said."

"Oh, I see," he remarked after a pause. "You mean I'm getting a little trick of talking like your father? Well, he's tremendously stimulating, isn't he? You see, Mrs. Doon, I'm owing him a complete change in my life, my point of view, my material prospects, my capacity for enjoying beautiful things. He's a liberal education to me. You can't think what an enormous admiration I have for him. I've never met any one within a thousand miles of him."

"Neither have I," said Valerie.

"I'm so glad," he declared. "So glad to hear you say that."

She debated within herself whether she should explain the irony of her remark. But she was tired. She would succeed with him as much as with Suzanne. He would not heed a hundred gipsy warnings. What was the good? If he chose to be lured into the spider's web and in the course of time be sucked to an empty shell why should she interfere? She herself, poor dragon-fly caught and kept alive in the toils, was impotent.

Still, the simple-minded loyalty of Timothy appealed to her pity; and as they sat and talked, she found herself endowed with an unsuspected gift—that of the sympathetic questioner and listener. For he talked of his dull and eventless history, from the time of his being dropped by the housemaid to the excitement of recent months. She became aware of a fragrance in this revelation of a sweet and simple soul which brought her a new sensation of peace and almost of comfort. Once, to Suzanne she had called him a dry stick, and then, contemptuously altering her metaphor, a bit of wet wood. Of that judgment, as she listened to his artless talk, for he reacted to her encouragement, she now felt foolishly ashamed. The man was not wood dry or wet, but a very human impressionable being, with the primitive instincts of honour and fidelity rooted in the depths of his heart; a man afraid more of himself than of his fellow-men; one who could not conceive base motives in others until they had been disclosed by base action and who then would conscientiously sweep the horizon for excuses in mitigation.

It was amazing this new-found gift of the encouraging

question. She used it with the lavishness of a child. Timothy spoke of things he had never mentioned before to living soul; half wondering how he found words to express the thoughts that had long lain musty and undeveloped in his mind. His marriage, which for years had been but a drab dream of long ago, now bloomed suddenly as a happening both vivid and sorrowful. He took all the blame, and catching a gleam of scepticism in the woman's eyes grew queerly passionate about it. The dull, uncomprehending drag on the woman with vision and ideals—he understood it all now. Well, it was past, over and done with. You couldn't recall the dead. One's duty was to the living. There was Naomi in whom his life was centred.

"You must bring her over—and Phoebe too—to stay with me," said Valerie. "I've never had anything to do with children in my life, but I'm sure I should love them —and I'd do my best to make them love me."

"They would simply adore it," cried Timothy.

"I know my father would say I was neurotic and always out for new sensations. But don't believe him. You know I'm sincere."

She had thrown off her languid manner and there was an appeal in her eyes which Timothy had never seen before.

"Why, of course, my dear Mrs. Doon."

"Oh, call me Valerie. We're all tangled up so intimately together in this extraordinary will that formalities are absurd. And you've been talking Timothy to me all the evening and not Mr. Swayne. Suzanne calls you Timothy so why shouldn't I?"

He made one of his shy gestures. "It's all very delightful. Do you know," he said, after a pause, "ever

since Suzanne swooped down upon me I've been living in a sort of incredible fairy tale. One extraordinary thing after another has happened to me. Yes, it is a tangle" —he smiled—"a most happy tangle. Fancy my sitting here with you——"

A clock far away in the shaded room struck one silver note.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Half-past something."

He pulled out his old silver watch, his father's before him—it had never occurred to him that self-respecting men who thought even in hundreds nowadays did not carry silver watches—and rose hastily.

"Good Lord! It's one o'clock! I had no idea I had been boring you all these hours. Really I am ashamed—I'm——"

He stammered excuses which she laughed away.

"It's the only enjoyable evening I've had for years."

He could not know how truly she spoke. Yet her tone was not one of idle graciousness. Once more Timothy was puzzled. These moments of mind bewilderment were always recurring in his fairy-tale. He could only find the conventional words:

"It's awfully good of you to say so."

And then he could have kicked himself. For he wanted to say a great deal more. But what? He hadn't the faintest idea. He relapsed into his ordinary shyness.

"I must let you go to bed."

"And I you. Don't sit up for father. His business affairs keep him up till three or four o'clock in the morning."

"I'll just have one pipe, if I may smoke it here," said Timothy.

"Pipe?" she cried. "I never thought of it. Why haven't you smoked half a dozen during the evening?"

They moved together towards the door. She held out her hand bidding him good night.

"There's one thing you haven't told me," she said. "You haven't told me whether you've fallen in love with Suzanne or not."

His face flushed brick-red.

"Suzanne? She is my ward. I couldn't dream of such a thing!"

Her little laugh was elfin as she vanished wraith-like down the corridor.

Timothy pulled out an old briar-wood pipe and tobacco pouch from his dinner-jacket pocket and stood with his back to the embers in the great fireplace. No. He had not told her. He had told her everything about himself but that. One doesn't tell a woman—a very young woman—things about which one feels ashamedly guilty. The moth would be a silly ass to confess to another moth, no matter how sympathetic, his insane desire for the star.

When Suzanne returned to Paris, after her mourning sojourn at Dreuil, he had already returned to London.

"I hope you gave the dear old thing a good time," said Suzanne lightly to Valerie.

Valerie frowned. "I don't like to hear you talk of him in that airy way. You don't understand him. He's much more than a dear old thing."

"But I thought——" began Suzanne astonished.

"So did I. But I was wrong."

"Oh!" said Suzanne.

Now, there are a hundred ways of saying, "Oh!"

CHAPTER XII

WITH October came the great change in Timothy's daily life. Instead of the congested narrowness of St. Mary Axe, he found himself in the spaciousness of Kingsway. Instead of threading his way through musty passages smelling of the Unwashed Ancient with the scythe, known as Time, he was flashed up to his office in a gilded lift by a gilt-buttoned girl attendant, of comely elegance. Instead of the dingy fly-blown room, he entered one Turkey-carpeted, restfully papered, hung with calm mezzotints. Before a writing-table exquisitely equipped—onyx ink-stand with three kinds of ink, morocco leather blotting-pad, morocco stationery case, onyx trays for sealing-wax, dies, calendars, silver ash-trays, silver cigarette-box, electric bell-pushes, telephone, a deeply upholstered circular writing-chair suggested the luxury of toil. When he sat in it he felt rich and successful. He could lean far back, fold his finger-tips together with his elbows on the arms, and think in appropriate millions. He loved the chair, so different from the old cane-bottomed thing in St. Mary Axe which made the seats of his trousers shiny long before their time, and, occasionally, when there was a little broken bit of cane which he had neglected to pare down with his penknife, made a jagged and unseemly tear. Sitting in it, he could look at the warm south-western sky; if he rose and stood by the carefully cleaned window, he could see the river and the bridge and the grey mass of Lambeth Palace and the warm red block of St. Thomas's Hospital. He was high up, on friendly terms

with air and sky and whatever sun vouchsafed to unveil itself over London; whereas formerly, on the ground floor, at the back of the offices of Combermere, Son & Combermere, he had been content to cancel such sweet things out of his life's equation.

In an outer room sat three clerks and a white-haired white-moustached multilinguist by the name of Soussouki, who, titular secretary, had hitherto been a kind of chargé d'affaires of the London agency of Moordius & Co. But never had he sat in the inner room. There indeed he had conducted such confidential interviews as were necessary, but it was the private sanctum of the Great Man himself, with the hall-mark of the Great Man's unerring taste on every object and in every shade of colour. Soussouki would no more have dreamed of occupying it during the Great Man's absence than would a dignified butler of installing himself in the best bed-chamber while the family were abroad. No question of jealousy therefore could arise when Mr. Moordius, his arm around Timothy's shoulders, installed him in the soft arm-chair as London agent.

"Soussouki," he had said, "is in the inner confidence of the firm. Until you have found your feet—and indeed for ever afterwards"—with a flattering bow to the white-moustached secretary—"you can place implicit trust in him."

So Timothy sat in his delightful office, for a great part of his time at the feet of Gamaliel Soussouki (who stood deferentially) and learned the principles of international banking. It seemed very simple. It was by no means laborious. He was never called upon to add up two and two together. Save to sign letters he hardly took pen in hand. Daily cables from Paris in code, deciphered in the

outer office, broadly outlined operations which in their turn were dependent on the phases of the London money market assiduously telephoned from the city. Every interview was preceded by an informing chat with Soussouki, whose knowledge of personalities struck Timothy as prodigious. Instead of slaving hard all day long, Timothy found time often hang heavy on his hands. He discovered that if he turned up in the morning between half-past ten and eleven and left between half-past four and five, his day's work could be easily performed. He could also find time between those hours for lengthy luncheons in Strand restaurants, offered him by pleasant, prosperous men with whom the firm had business relations. Now and then, in the case of important clients, he did the entertaining—at the firm's expense. At first he had been shy of making use of the privilege. Sensitive, he would have preferred to invite a man to his club and pay out of his own pocket for their simple meal. But Moordius himself insisted.

"Take them to the Savoy and fill them up with the best—give them champagne and old brandy and soothe them with five-shilling cigars. I know it's vulgar; but when a man wears a diamond ring on his little finger, you may be sure he likes it."

"But when like you and me, he doesn't?" asked Timothy.

Moordius smiled approvingly and tapped him on the coat-lapel. "Psychologist! Ah! I always knew you had *le flair des hommes*. In that case an old Montrachet or a Château Leoville of good vintage, is quite unostentatious but infinitely seductive."

"Do you mind if I write those names down," said Timothy, whipping out pencil and an old envelope.

"Always remember, my dear fellow," said Moordius, "that the reduction of your enemy to a mellow altruism is the first principle of business."

"But," said Timothy, with a puckering of the brow, after he had given himself time for the assimilation of this wisdom, "what happens if he only wants cold meat and Vichy water?"

"Join him in his inhuman meal," smiled Moordius, "and talk to him furiously about golf or God or Einstein, and hurry back and take counsel with Soussouki, and if necessary telephone me to come over by plane."

"I see," said Timothy, sagely.

"On the other hand," continued Moordius, "the other people are out to do the mellowing trick on you. You must be on your guard."

Timothy protested. He was an abstemious man. Moordius's plump hand was in itself explanatory.

"My dear boy, it's not a crude matter of intoxication. I could give you an hour's lecture on my incontrovertible theory. Primitive people invited their enemies to a banquet, made them drunk and then murdered them. Nothing simpler. But between that and the modern method of putting them into a state of hypnosis either by the judicious use of food and drink, or by the charm of a *décor* or the fascination of a woman, or the apparently unbounded hospitality of your own sheer human soul, there's an infinity of degrees. I once made a hard-headed water-drinking Dane eat out of my hand by sitting down to the piano and singing to him, in his own language, the time honoured Danish lullaby by which his mother used to rock him to sleep—by the way, the most beautiful cradle song in the world—*'Sov mit Barn jeg sidder ved din Vugge*——" He hummed a few bars. "But we're wan-

dering from the original point. Entertain at your discretion. If even we get a paltry thousand pounds out of a deal, it is surely worth while making the sacrificial offering to the gods of the flesh of a lamb or the juice of a grape. You're but the impersonal high priest. Did you ever hear of a high priest paying for burnt offerings out of his own pocket?"

Behold therefore a new Timothy, bowed down to by obsequious *maîtres d'hotel,* served with anxious precision by forewarned waiters, signing his bill with a lordly air, when he had not enough ready money in his pocket, scarcely knowing whether he detested or gloried in this vicarious hospitality. But the latter phase prevailed. For the first time in his drab and subordinated life he tasted the sweets of power. On his lips lay the words "yes" or "no," in response to the subtle proposals of hosts or guests which involved question of vast sums of money. He did not reflect, in his simplicity, that his instructions from Paris, his counsel from Soussouki—which amounted to instructions—had been definite and that his plodding intellect had woven those instructions into an unalterable purpose. Subconsciously his mind worked with the unquestioning obedience of the born drudge. Consciously he flamed to himself as the conductor of great operations. The great Moordius was his "dear Peter." Fortune at last smiled on him and he had a debauch of prize-fighting.

Meanwhile things domestic ran on oiled wheels. Angela Messiter, the russet-cheeked governess, firmly ruled the nursery. He knew not whether to feel glad or sorry to find the incomparable Suzanne so easily replaced; but he consoled himself with the reflection that after all she was the successor chosen by Suzanne herself and specially

trained—in less than a week—in the mysteries of her craft. Thus there had been a continuity of Suzanne. Naomi and Phoebe accepted her with the cheerful philosophy of childhood. If the washing of the hands and ears and various other absurd maggots of the adult brain are insisted on, what matter the insister, so long as her methods of insistence are not too repulsive? Now Dorothy—occasional vicegerent—was a terror. Her voice was hard, the palms of hands ever ready to scrub were harder. They conspired against Dorothy, as against the enemy, and rejoiced secretly at her indignation; whereas Miss Messiter seemed to divine their plots before maturity and to render them humorously futile. They continued to adore Timothy, who during the nursery tea-hour became more responsible for their entertainment, Angela Messiter keeping in the background with a peculiar demureness. For it happened that if they went off to play by themselves, Timothy and the governess were thrown together into the frigidity of an inane conversation. He therefore had to exert himself; and not having acquired a fuller imaginative faculty than that once depreciated by Naomi, he had recourse to the facts with which he was familiar. To retain the interest of Naomi and Phoebe and thus save him from embarrassed talk with Miss Messiter, he recounted the exploits of Carpentier and Gunboat Smith and Jimmy Wilde and Bombadier Wells, and exhibited pictures in the newspapers and snap-shots taken in sporting circles. He waxed eloquent, Homeric, in the narration of great combats, so that the little girls were thrilled with the excitement of the tide of battle. He bought them a set of immense boxing-gloves, not so much in order to convert the nursery into a prize-ring, as to teach them, by practical demonstration,

the technique of the game. So it came to pass that when a great fight occurred which shook the telegraph system of the world, the children shared in the universal excitement. They listened breathlessly to Timothy when he read them the account in the morning papers and sat enraptured before a cinematograph representation at a picture palace.

Incidentally, however, they learned to box. Miss Messiter made mild protest. It was too rough for little girls. But Timothy laughed away her fears. It was good exercise. How could they hurt each other, with their puny strength buffered, as it were, by the soft-padded gloves? In the course of time the nursery was, after all, converted into a prize-ring. Timothy, ever methodical, rigged it up with ropes and chairs and towels and all the paraphernalia of the sport and refereed watch in hand, with extravagant solemnity. Which of the two combatants should represent Carpentier was always decided by the spin of a coin.

Once a little boy came to tea, and seeing the gloves in a corner fitted them on and vain-gloriously challenged the world. To Timothy's delight, Naomi hammered him unmercifully, so that he cried and went home to his mother who thenceforward regarded Timothy as a monster of violent depravity. But Timothy sent the story of his small daughter's prowess all the round of financial London and extolled it with great earnestness in the expert circle of the National Sporting Club.

It was into this pugilistic atmosphere that Suzanne with a score of trunks descended in November.

There had been much commotion before her arrival. The houses in Montpellier Square are small. Two children, a governess and a single man take up an absurd

number of rooms. Timothy with his newly acquired faculty of thinking in thousands, had wild dreams of renting a larger house. But those being days of limited accommodation in London, house-agents received him with polite derision, when they learned that he was seeking a mansion of modester type than Buckingham Palace. They had scores of palaces to let, because their owners could not afford to live in them; and cheap, too, at the price; but the house of Timothy's desire was as unobtainable—at a reasonable rental—as a castle of dreams. Timothy compromised by turning himself out of his own room and occupying an empty and spartanically furnished chamber on the top floor. Surveying his old room dismantled of his personal belongings, he turned disconsolately to Angela Messiter, whom he had called into consultation.

"It looks decidedly drab."

"It does," she answered.

"I had no idea that the removal of my own odds and ends would make such a difference." His memory wandered to Suzanne's apartments in the Avenue Gabriel through which Moordius had conducted him. He shivered. "It's positively bleak."

Never till that moment had he realized the inadequacy for this ward of fortune, of the brass-knobbed iron bedstead, the cheap walnut furniture.

"She'll want much more cupboard room," said Angela, who had heard of her predecessor's fashionable existence.

"I ought to have taken Rockhampton House," said Timothy. "I had the offer of it for two thousand a year. Of course it would have taken fifteen servants to run it."

He rumpled his hair in dire perplexity.

"This will never do," said he.

"I'm afraid it won't," said Angela.

"It reminds me of a horrible hotel bedroom in Bolton." He looked at her in helpless masculine surrender. "What on earth can we do?"

She glanced obliquely at him with a little smile.

"Would you leave it to me?"

"Oh, Lord, yes. If you only would." He drew a breath of relief. "You see I never entered into the practical side of things until just lately, and now I'm struck all of a heap. I know I'm awfully to blame. Why didn't I think of it before?"

"I've been thinking of it for quite a long time," said Angela demurely. "All you have to do, is to clear all these things out."

"What shall I do with them?"

"Any auction people will take them away and sell them," she said cheerfully. Timothy smiled in recognition of a master-mind. "We can distemper the walls a nice shade of brown—I don't think she'd like this rose and trellis wallpaper—besides, it's a bit shabby, isn't it? Splotches where the pictures have been." Timothy had removed various beloved sporting prints to his new abode. "It will have to be repapered anyway and distempering is quicker and cheaper. So I say a nice shade of brown. Russet. And green curtains. An autumn effect. Faded copper-beech against spruce. Of course a green carpet, and we can play with the browns and bits of vermilion like the maple, you know, in the cushions and chair-covers." The colour rose in her olive cheeks and unwonted animation came into her eyes. "You'll see. It'll be lovely. That little note of vermilion will whip it all up. If you like my idea, the thing's done."

Timothy stood stupefied before this feminine intelligence. The thing wasn't done at all. The main question in his man's mind was the replacing of the horrid-looking bed with its stark white counterpane, and the rest of the furniture which reminded him of the hotel room in Bolton. He did not realize one of the fundamental sex-differences. Man starts with the essential and gropes his way upwards towards the non-essential; whereas woman wreathes herself round with the non-essential and then, with a sudden swoop, dives to the essential like a hawk.

Russet and spruce and maple and the room was furnished. The little governess beamed certainty. Timothy titubated.

"But she can't sleep on curtains or sit on distempered walls. We shall have to get some furniture. That beastly toilet table! We must find one that'll hold all Miss Chastel's bottles and brushes and combs and things. The thing she has in Paris is about five feet long with a mirror and electric lights all round it."

"We can easily get some nice old brown oak stuff," said Miss Messiter. "Of course most of it will be faked. It can't be helped. We're in a hurry. But it doesn't matter very much. It's the only furniture that would fit in with the scheme, unless you would have mahogany—Chippendale. Real Chippendale of course would cost thousands. Modern Chippendale would make the room look like a hotel bedroom at Monte Carlo, which would be as bad as Bolton. No. Good honest old brown oak is the only wear."

"I'm sure you know best," said Timothy.

So Angela Messiter, given carte blanche, turned over the children to Dorothy and went forth to have the time of her life.

It was into a most companionable room that Timothy led Suzanne on the evening of her arrival.

She cried out as she entered: "My dear Timothy, how perfectly delightful. And the beautiful chrysanthemums!"

Timothy flushed with pleasure. Tawny and russet, the great flowers had caught his fancy when he had gone to a florist to order he knew not what—roses or violets or lilies. They were his sole contribution to the scheme, and Suzanne had picked them out.

"I'm afraid it's rather a change from Paris," said he apologetically.

"A blessed change. Here's absolute rest. How did you ever come to think of it?"

"I didn't," said Timothy. "It's all Miss Messiter's idea. But," he added eagerly, "I did choose the chrysanthemums."

Then the children who had already given Suzanne riotous welcome in the hall, burst in.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, do come to the nursery and see us have a boxing match. Then we can each have a second instead of dividing Miss Messiter between us."

She turned on Timothy in mock rebuke. "Have you brought your prize-fighting into the nursery?"

Naomi answered for him.

"Oh, yes. It's lovely. The other day I made Archie Mayne's nose bleed like anything."

"It's high time I came home," said Suzanne.

The word fell like balm on Timothy's soul. He brightened, in spite of a sudden asperity in her voice.

"Of course, if you object——" he began.

"Have you ever seen a bull-fight?"

The children jumped down from the green-quilted bed where they had perched themselves.

"Have you? Oh, Mademoiselle, do tell us all about it."

"I should think it would be most interesting," said Timothy.

"It's horrible," said Suzanne.

Wishing to cleanse herself from the stains of travel she cleared the room. Timothy with a child hanging on each arm stood by the landing.

"Why doesn't Mademoiselle like our boxing?" asked Phoebe.

"I don't know, dear," said Timothy perplexed. "I'll ask her."

He did, when she came down fresh and serene to dinner. She was all smiles, noting the dinner-jacket put on by Timothy with some hesitancy for the first time in his own house. In answer to his direct question she laughed.

"I'm sorry, but the idea of a little boy's nose bleeding like anything put me in mind of a bull I saw killed. It was just an association of ideas. You know I hate cruelty. It struck me that if Naomi enjoyed making a boy's nose bleed, her finer senses might be so hardened that she could look on unmoved at the horrors of the bull-ring."

"It never struck me in that light," said Timothy. "If you disapprove I'll stop it at once."

"Besides," she went on, "boxing isn't good for young females. They're built differently from males. Your little governess knows it, of course, but she has been too shy to tell you."

"I never thought of that," said Timothy.

"Of course not," said Suzanne, unfolding her dinner napkin. "What should you know about females?"

He confessed his entire ignorance, late husband and present father and purveyor to a house full of females though he was. Yet he uttered mild protest. The closing down of the ring would cause black disappointment in the nursery. She laughed at his perplexed dismay.

"If you insist on their blood-thirstiness, get them fencing kits. It's a much finer exercise and will develop their figures. My father taught me and I'll teach them."

"You're a wonder," said Timothy.

"I hope Miss Messiter won't object."

"If she does," said Timothy, "I'll——"

He waved his hand, satisfied with the rhetorical effect of an aposiopesis. But Suzanne laughed.

"You'll—what?"

"I'll ask you to find me another governess," said Timothy.

She laughed again, in gay humour, nodded.

"You've no idea, Timothy, how you've improved. I feel I'm going to have six months real enjoyment."

His face clouded over. "About that I don't know. It has been worrying me. In Paris——"

"I've put Paris behind me," she said quickly. "I want to forget Paris. I want just this little house where I was so happy, with the children and books and you."

Timothy stuck a finger on his shirt-front. "Me?" he asked.

"Yes, you. You're the most restful being I know."

"My dear friend," she went on after a short pause, "you can't imagine how I've been longing for this interval of peace."

Timothy glanced up at her, struck by the sincere note

in her voice and met the clear earnestness of her eyes.

"I thought you were ideally happy in France."

He was puzzled. What more could she want? She had led the life of a princess. He had seen her in her environment of homage. Her path of luxury was lined with adulation. Before her arrival he had dreamed impotently of the continuance in London of her regal career. Already his conscience had been pricked by the mortgage of his fees as Executor and Trustee under old Joe Grabbiter's will. Of course Moordius had told him in his airy millionaire way of the drafts on her eventual fortune which Suzanne had signed, and which he had honoured, for clothes and pocket money. But only lately had he learned the amount. It was fantastic. The modern Eve seemed to clothe herself in fig leaves (lasting but a day) at about twenty pounds a leaf.

"But my dear fellow," he had said, aghast, "I haven't all that ready money to advance."

"She can draw on Moordius & Co. for what she likes," Moordius had replied blandly. "A matter of business. With bills falling due two or three years hence, the discount must be heavy, especially in this world uncertainty of exchange. When she comes into her fortune, the cost of this accommodation will be relatively trivial."

"That alters the position considerably. I understood that you were individually responsible."

"I should have made it clear from the beginning," said Moordius. "Moordius & Co., you see, can drive a pretty little coach and four through old Joe Grabbiter's will. There's nothing to prevent me, as head of the bank, from making her whatever advances she needs, or you as London agent from doing the same—of course, with my nominal sanction. In his pleasant malice our

dear old friend over-reached himself. He forgot Moordius & Co."

Timothy had no doubt of the Trustee's power of advance. He also felt the chess-player's delight at seeing a blustering player lose a valuable piece. Moordius, who little suspected the crafty malignity of the man he called his friend, had swept his queen from the board. Timothy chuckled in righteous spirit of vengeance.

This money business was a relief; but still there were the luxuries with which Moordius had surrounded her and for which, naturally, under the will, he was entitled to make no charge—the splendour of palace hotels, costly banquets, gorgeous motor-cars. He could not even run to a Ford.

So he said to her:

"I thought you were ideally happy in France."

She laughed again.

"I'm going to be happier here. That's to say if you'll let me."

"I'd give—well I'd give my life," said Timothy hurriedly, "to make you happy. What can I do?"

"It's not a question of doing, but of being. Just be yourself—and for goodness sake don't think of entertaining me. You love quiet and I want it. I want to be alone a good deal. If I hadn't this haven of rest to come to, I should have yearned for a little solitary hut on the top of a mountain."

"Good Lord, why?" asked the literal Timothy.

She bent down her shapely head and looked at him sideways.

"Shall I make you a little confession? Before I went to Paris, I thought there was only one Suzanne Chastel in this body of mine. I was rather pleased with her. I

thought I knew her inside out. Before I left Paris she had split up into half a dozen Suzanne Chastels and I don't know which is the best one. And I've got to find out. And the only place to find out a thing of that sort is the top of a mountain, or Montpellier Square."

"My dear Suzanne," cried Timothy. "I don't quite understand; but if you really want quiet, you've got the drawing-room and dining-room absolutely to yourself. I'll dine at the club or have a tray in my library. That's a brilliant idea," he went on eagerly. "It won't matter to me a bit. In fact I shall be awfully hurt and distressed if you don't fall in with it."

Her eyes softened and a little smile played round her lips. It was then that he became aware of an indefinable change in her from the young Diana who had descended from heaven and serenely informing him that she had told her uncle to go to the devil, had proclaimed herself the ideal governess for Naomi. He had a confused notion that one of the six new and baffling Suzannes was looking out of her grey eyes and had repressed the usual mockery of her disdainful mouth. For the smile was not mocking; rather, it was pitiful; the smile which is often the outward and visible sign of inward invisible tears.

She shook her head, and spoke softly: "It's dear of you to be so silly. But please don't. If you really want to please me, do you know what you can do?"

Timothy hadn't the faintest idea.

"You can give Miss Messiter six months' holiday—on board-wages, so that the poor dear won't be out of pocket —I'll arrange that with her—and let me look after the children as I used to do. Of course," she laughed, "there's no question of salary."

It was some moments before Timothy could recover breath to reply to this amazing proposition.

"But I thought you wanted peace and quiet."

"I'll find them," she said, "and all sorts of other comforts."

"But it's ridiculous," he protested.

"My dear Timothy," she retorted, "if you can tell me one thing in life that can't be proved to be ridiculous, I'll go into a convent and become a nun."

Timothy yielded; but on conditions. Miss Messiter should be always on tap. She should be liable to be recalled, as it were, at a moment's notice.

"Why?" asked Suzanne. "Do you think I'm too weak to carry out my contract?"

Timothy crumbled his bread. "Not you. It's I. Perhaps I mayn't be able to carry out mine."

Elbow on the table, she looked squarely across at him.

"Now what on earth do you mean by that?"

For once in his life Timothy was consciously disingenuous. "I might marry, you see."

"Whom? Valerie?"

He stared at her. "Good God, no!"

"Then who is the lucky woman?"

"There isn't any yet," said Timothy, "but six months is a long time."

"I'll chance it," she laughed.

"But why, when the conditions are so simple?"

"Have it your own way," she replied. "What does it matter?"

CHAPTER XIII

IT mattered very much to Timothy as the weeks and months passed by. They were wonderful, golden-vapoured, flecked with diamond moments. Yet at times, he felt as though their exquisiteness could not last; the exquisiteness that depended on his own courage and strength of will. For so did he put to himself the silence of his love for Suzanne. There must come a time when the serenity of their life together must be clouded; when the storm would break; when, in literal fact, the indelicacy of living alone under the same roof as a man passionately in love with her would drive her indignantly out of the house.

Once you begin to talk about love as it affects various individuals you can go on for ever. You can treat the subject in a million ways and complicate it with a million definitions. The fact remains that generalizations on the most fundamental and yet most intricate emotions of existence are entirely absurd. Had Timothy been a man of swift imagination and facile passions, the position would have been untenable. He would have received, as the French say, the thunder-stroke, and, having made the consequent fool of himself, would have found it impossible to carry out the terms of old Joe Grabbiter's will. Love can play the very devil with people's sanity.

But, such was the temperament of Timothy that it made him more sane than ever. It had come to him very gradually, first as a sweet rain, then as a trickling stream, gladdening, heartening, so that when it swelled into full

river flood pouring calmly through his being, he was scarcely aware of the mighty development. Although in moments of companionship with his solitary pipe, before the fire, he ruminated over the dangers of his passion, his heart was seldom wrung by the tortures of desire. He worshipped her from afar, realizing her infinite remoteness. Sometimes he dreamed that he kissed her as she stood folded in his arms, and in his dream it all seemed so simple and he wondered why he had not engaged before in so natural a proceeding. But when he awoke, especially when next morning he sat with Suzanne and the children at breakfast and met her frank and perfectly indifferent eyes, he felt ashamed, as though he had offered her an insult. Then again, after she had been kind and playful, the perfect comrade of intimacy, and he retired with his pipe, putting the question of her sentiments towards him to the counselling smoke, his sensitive honour took umbrage and dismissed such questionings as vain. Not only did her fortune place her beyond his reach, but as her guardian he had been given a sacred trust. On all sides, by honour, duty, common sense, he was firmly bound.

And yet, and yet . . . with all his chivalrous ignorance of life and his none too fervent Northern blood, Timothy was a man. Suzanne was a woman, a young woman, and a young woman claiming her modern freedom of speech and act—— There was the white tie custom, at once his joy and his terror.

Since Angela Messiter's departure, he had descended to her room next the children's. There had been a little battle about this, Suzanne declaring that, in her capacity of governess the room was hers, and Timothy swearing, with unusual fervour, that he would never commit the profanity of sleeping in the room of russet and green and

vermilion especially prepared for her—fit, as far as his poor efforts could make it, for a lady, but indecent for a man. And Timothy having won, took over the governess's room. Now, Timothy, being gradually instructed both by Suzanne and by his lunching friends at the Savoy in the art of life, became a mild theatre-goer and an occasional diner-out. Convention, therefore, demanded the frequent wearing of white ties. Hitherto he had worn ready-made bows, which were now condemned by Suzanne. Confronted with unmanageable strips, he reduced the mangling of white ties, so that they looked like scraps of lint picked off a battlefield, to an exact science. Suzanne having her own ideas of the correctitude of the white ties worn by her male companions in society, decreed that no white bow of Timothy's should be tied by other hands than her own. Accordingly, Naomi, appointed liaison officer during the dressing hour between Timothy and Suzanne, dodged in and out of their respective rooms until the moment in Timothy's toilette arrived when he needed Suzanne's ministrations. Naomi bolted, an excited Iris. Timothy black-trousered, white-shirted and collared advanced through the open door into the nursery, and stood tie in hand till Suzanne, as a general rule, hastily invested in a silk wrapper, for she held in contempt the feminine privilege of keeping men waiting, was dragged joyously into the room at the end of Naomi's arm.

It was deliciously intimate. Too intimate. The attraction of the woman who knows how to dress well is as naught to that of the woman who instinctively knows how to half-dress well. Suzanne, scornful of conscious coquetry, obeyed the daughter of France's blind instinct to huddle on her wrapper in the most engaging way in

the world. She came flushed and laughing, led away by the child's excitement, and took from the incompletely vested Timothy the ceremonial white tie. How else could she appeal to the most fish-blooded of men than as all that was most desirable and adorable in woman? Her deft cool fingers now and again touched his chin, and the thrill of the touch ran through his body to his feet. Her happy mind was concentrated on the fashioning of his bow. But her breath brushed his cheek and her near, warm perfume stole over his senses.

"There!" she led him by his shirted arm to the gilt nursery mirror over the fireplace. "Don't you dare fiddle with it."

She gave him a friendly push towards his bedroom door and vanished while he looked after her, absurdly nympholept.

On other occasions and analogous to the white tie ceremony did Timothy's mere manhood urge him to valorous high-handedness. But after a while his despairing common sense prevailed and he resumed his inward and outward attitude of devoted decorum.

And Suzanne? That dear old Timothy was, in his dear old Timothesque fashion, somewhat in love with her, she was well aware. He made it obvious in ways so diffident, his lover's claims were so unexacting, that she took it as a pleasant matter of no vast importance. Now and then, when an imp of mischief tempted her to lead him into the path of sentiment, his efforts, nearly always successful, to wriggle out afforded her not too malicious amusement. Timothy was a dear; but who could take him seriously? Besides, he was dwarfed in her constant thoughts by a far more powerful personality. The rest from his dominance which she had expected to find in

Timothy's quiet household eluded her disconcertingly.

Continuously, a graceful line, a tiny gift of book or piece of music, or a literally flying visit kept her in magnetic contact with the man. In spite of the unfailing joy of the fresh minds of the children, in spite of her interest in Timothy's worldly development, she missed the companionship of Moordius more than she deigned to realize. For not only did that companionship satisfy all her intellectual and artistic cravings, but it never ceased to flatter those feminine instincts which her modernity professed to despise, but which were the inalienable heritage, through the countless centuries, of her sex. She knew herself watched by the expert's eye, studied in the light of the expert's knowledge. He could interpret the workings of her soul by the shadows passing over her face. He was sensitive to every shade of mood. There was no need to explain. He divined. The only occasion on which they had been for a few moments apart had been that of the bull-fight. But if one demands the Absolute, one is lost. Even then, as soon as he had pulled his bull-tossed wits together, he had appreciated to the utmost the inner horror of her being. And his homage stripped of the glamour of his wealth, his wit, his intellect, his exquisitely worldly polish, was as delicate and chivalrous as that of old Timothy himself. Of course, there was his age. Fifty. To twenty-two, it was mathematically enormous. But in his company, so gifted was he with the clear eyes and the spontaneity of youth, she rarely thought of him otherwise than as her contemporary.

He had the elfin quality too of sudden appearances; romance rather enhanced than tarnished by flashing motor-car and liveried chauffeur.

"I left Paris this morning and came straight to you. Do you mind an early lunch? I have some business in the city, and I must be back to give dinner to the Jugo-Slavian minister whose government is in need of money."

Had he said that before sunset he must pluck a hair from Prester John's beard, could he have appeared more romantic?

There he was, spick-and-span, as though Joseph had turned him out five minutes ago, with the gorgeous limousine, summoned from Nowhere by a magical beckoning of his fingers, standing at the front door. And, in his hand, on the bleak and dismal winter morning, was a vast paper cone enclosing fresh exotic flowers with the drops of dew clinging to their petals.

He spoke in the language of the dew-besprinkled orchids. His home was left unto him desolate. The ghost of her laughed mockingly through the corridors. She had passed like a flower, leaving only the haunting perfume behind.

Said Suzanne, on one of these meetings:

"I hate stale scent. It must be horrible."

"No, my dear Suzanne," said he. "There are flowers and flowers. You remember your Baudelaire—I quote through the mist of forgetfulness—the imperishable figure—*grain de musc qui gis invisible, Au fond de mon eternité.*"

"That sounds dangerously near a declaration, doesn't it?" said Suzanne.

His benevolent eyes narrowed for an infinitesimal fraction of a second and pierced through her. Then he smiled and made a gallant bow.

"Yes. In the jargon of bridge—one heart."

She laughed. "One no trump. I must go upstairs and find a hat."

If Timothy wriggled out of the paths of sentiment into which she maliciously led him, here positions were reversed. With Moordius it was she who eluded, escaping nymph-wise into the bracken. She fled instinctively; often against her reason, against her desire. Her free spirit stood shy at the final grip of the master-hand always reaching out ever so delicately towards her. She knew, as every woman knows, that he had marked her down. He was most courteously, patiently, devotedly biding his time. The boa-constrictor is never in any vast hurry with a rabbit. The image worked her into humorous fury. She acknowleged the fascination, but swore resistence. That he was in love with her she had no doubt. He paid his court with the air of the Great Lover. The Romantic again.

An English soldier-boy with whom she had danced and consorted at Aix-les-Bains—"flirted" would have been the word twenty years ago, but in the case of the modern Diana it would be misleading and inaccurate—fell headlong into love with her and, after the inarticulate way of his kind, urged his suit. He hadn't a bean and he was going to rejoin his regiment in India in a couple of months, and he hadn't much brains, he knew, but his people were all right and he could put up a string of war decorations, if that mattered anything to her, and he was crazy over her and would work like hell to give her a good time. Here was love, sincerity, honesty. An ingenuous youth fashioned by the war into a clean man. But—she was conscious of the infernal exasperation of the "buts" in life, when she gave him kind dismissal—beyond his up-

right manhood, what could he give her? Already the tentacles of her nature had spread out towards companionship more subtle and more satisfying. He went away sorrowful, man-like, uncomprehending. The next morning he came again. He had been lying in wait for her, as she learned later, for an hour or two in the lounge of the Hotel Splendide. With a "For God's sake give me a minute," he dragged her into a remote corner and poured out his misery.

"You must think me the most unutterable cad that ever lived. I only heard last night who you really were. I swear to God, it never entered my head that you would have all those pots and pots of money. If I'd known I'd have cut my tongue out rather than talk as I did last night. I'm a damn fool, I know, for thinking you might possibly care for me, but I really was straight. You see what I mean, don't you, Miss Chastel? I've not slept a wink all night, thinking of it, upon my soul I haven't."

"If you go on talking like that," said Suzanne with a little lump in her throat, "I'll have to marry you straight away."

The tongue-tied Englishman was not equal to the situation. His absolution from motives mercenary was all that mattered for the moment. His honour was saved. He vanished from the world, until his leave was up, into the Cumbrian vagueness of his father's vicarage. This had been her only contact with the passion of contemporary youth. The episode had been pathetic in its egregious impossibility. Had he not fallen in love with her she would have taken him to her heart, for ever after, as a good comrade. But again—the infernal "but."

Why have grammarians called this word a conjunction? Is it through sheer stupidity or through a fuligi-

nous sense of ironical humour? It is the most disjunctive word in any language ever spoken by man.

Save by pity, by a pang or two of conscience for little encouragements permitted, her heart was untouched. She gave much thought to wondering why. He was not of the Satyrs whom her proud Dianadom derided. He was immaculate English in his wiry, clean-groomed physique, in his public-school honesty, in his soldier man's direct simplicity. At last, one night the solution came to her in a set of words which repeated themselves over and over until she went to sleep.

"I must marry an individual and not a type."

And so had come peace of mind. There were thousands of young Englishmen cut after his pattern, thinking the same semi-defined thoughts, speaking the same well-bred, half-educated language, actuated by the same honest motives, inspired by the same modest ideals. Now Moordius's deadliest enemy could not call him a type. He was intensely individual. The mere clean pinkiness of his exterior made him an arresting personality in any assembly. He belonged to no class yet to every class of society into which he was thrown, a banker among bankers, a gambler among gamblers, a fritterer among frivolities, an artist among artists, a politician among statesmen, a scholar among dryasdusts. It was this many-sidedness, each facet perfected, which, to a great extent, set him apart from his fellows. She had every reason mortal woman could have for submitting to his fascination. And he was in love with her. But she with him? She could not tell—and all the quiet humdrum leisure for self-communing in London brought her no nearer the truth. All she knew was that when he was away from her, life seemed inexplicably blank; when

he was with her, it was filled with warmth and colour.

One afternoon when Timothy came home and mounted as usual to the nursery, she rose and met him with curiously bright cheeks and eyes.

"Do you mind if your poor governess goes out to dinner with her guardian?"

Gratified, he said in his sober way that he would take her with pleasure. She cried laughingly:

"It isn't this guardian, it's the other."

"Moordius?"

"Of course. He rang me up ten minutes ago."

"I didn't know he was in London," said Timothy, with a puckering of the brows.

"He has been desperately busy," he tells me. "Anyhow, can the governess have an evening off?"

"Naturally," said Timothy. "To ask is absurd."

Later, arrayed in her best, with her long mink fur coat flung open she danced in radiant to bid the children good night. They regarded the enchanting vision with feminine adoration. She turned to Timothy, who, with tools and glue-pot, was performing belated veterinary operations on the stock of the farmyard:

"Do I look all right?"

He nodded. "Splendid. I always liked you in that dress."

"Oh, you poor Timothy," she laughed outright. "It's brand new. The first time of wearing. I hope it will make more impression on my other guardian."

"He's got the hang of such things, much more than I have," said Timothy.

He saw her into the limousine sent by Moordius, and re-entered the house somewhat depressed by her high spirits, vaguely uneasy. Two nights ago he had taken

her to a theatre, when she had manifested a state of polite and pleasureable anticipation. Her demeanour, that of the young woman conducted to entertainment, had been irreproachable. But her eyes had not danced and she had not arrayed herself in brand new magical garments; nor had she thought of asking him the unusual question of how she looked. For the first time Timothy felt a tiny rankle of jealousy. After a while, he shrugged admissive shoulders. It was natural that she should find more pleasure in Moordius's company than in his own. Moordius was a brilliant angel, whereas he himself was a very dull dog. Still, it was hard lines—seeing how he loved her—that her eyes never danced for him as they danced for an elderly man whose affection for her could not be otherwise than urbanely paternal.

He sat all the evening in his library over chess problems to distract his thoughts. When he heard the click of her latch-key he went into the hall to meet her. The opening of the door coincided with the dragging sound of the re-started motor-car. She entered flushed and excited.

"Moordius sends you all kinds of messages. He couldn't come in because he's catching the midnight train to Scotland. It appears there's an obscure millionaire in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, who is playing 'Nearer my God to Thee' on the National Harp of Bulgaria—or is it Roumania? I suppose you know all about it."

"Not a thing," said Timothy.

"Well, it doesn't matter," she said with feminine blandness. "Political finance or financial politics are beyond me. I'm thirsty, Timothy; my throat is parched, my tongue's shrivelled like an autumn leaf."

Thus speaking, she followed him into the library where

her eye fell on the little table set with a glass of orange-juice and syphon and sugar and sandwiches wrapped in damp napkin.

"You are a dear, Timothy, to have thought of it."

Honest Timothy had to reply:

"I'm afraid it was Dorothy."

The thirsting damsel mixed her innocuous drink and drank half the contents of the glass.

"I wanted that badly." She took a sandwich. "You'd have thought of it, if Dorothy hadn't," she said consolingly.

Timothy, pouring himself out a mild whisky and soda, so that she should not feast alone, expressed the hope that she had spent a pleasant evening. She took her glass and sat on the old leather-covered couch, where she had sat on the day when she had arrived from Birmingham furious at the terms of old Joe Grabbiter's will.

"Very pleasant. We sat in a corner of the Carlton lounge and talked all the time."

Her tone suggested beatitude. Timothy again felt the rankle of jealousy. He could not give her a rapturous evening in the Carlton lounge to save his life. He would bore her to acerbity. He acknowledged the dismal truth.

"Moordius is a fascinating companion."

"That's the devil of it," she said, taking a cigarette from her case and tapping the end gently, "he is."

He came with a match. She drew a few puffs then she said:

"Listen, Timothy. I want to tell you something. I have to be straight, though it may hurt you, for I hate running crooked. Besides, as my other guardian, you've the right to know; and it's a matter entirely in your

hands. What would you say if Moordius asked me to marry him?"

"Marry him?" gasped Timothy, struck all of a heap. "Marry Moordius? Why, good God! He's old enough to be your father."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," she retorted.

Timothy limped across the room and back again.

"I suppose it hasn't," he said disconsolately. "I'm years older than you——"

"Which means——?"

"Nothing. Forgive me, Suzanne. You've given me rather a shock. You see that my responsibility is enormous, don't you."

"Of course—your consent——"

"Has Moordius asked you to marry him?"

"Not yet. But I can't see how he can help it. It's only a matter of delicacy—the mix up under my uncle's idiot will."

Timothy pulled himself together.

"And you, Suzanne?"

"If he asked me? Ninety-nine hundredths of me would say 'yes,' but one hundredth would say 'no.' "

"If I were a selfish brute," said Timothy, finding the articulation of despair, "I should advise you to listen to the one hundredth."

"But you're not," said Suzanne.

They discussed the all but indiscussible question. At last she rose and bade him good night.

"Nothing more can be said."

She passed through the open door, regal in her shimmering silver dress and the mantle of fur to her feet which she had retained because Timothy had let the fire out, and turned with a smile.

"Let us sleep on it."

Timothy swung the door almost savagely but, characteristically, caught it before it slammed.

"Sleep!" said he.

CHAPTER XIV

MOORDIUS, on his return from Glasgow, visited Timothy in his Kingsway office. To protect himself, after an all-night journey, against the bitter cold of an early March morning, he wore a coat lined and collared with sable which slipped from him on to a chair back with a soft animal heaviness, and he emerged as usual, spick-and-span and pink in morning coat, striped trousers, waistcoat-slip and discreet diamond pin in his black tie. He greeted Timothy gaily; but after scanning his face for a while he assumed an expression of concern. Timothy was not looking himself. Pulled down. Working too hard. The last thing a man should take with deadly seriousness was work, which was only the means to the end of the enjoyment of life. Timothy needed a change. Whereat Timothy protested that he had never been in robuster health; that, if he suffered at all, it was rather from under- than from over-work; and that the prospect of change always filled him with dread. Moordius clapped him on the shoulder and hailed him as dear old fellow, and banteringly:

"In your heart," said he, "your ideal of existence is still that of a train on a circular railway—the Inner Circle of London—and go round and round and round the same rails for ever and ever. We're going to change all that."

Timothy looked guiltily at his idol and benefactor. How could he tell him that the gnawing terror of jealousy had kept him awake for a couple of nights? How could he tell him of his shame at this unjustifiable jealousy, of

the poor fight he had been fighting with himself for the past two days? There are things one must hold secret even from one's idol and benefactor. To end the embarrassing topic, he lugged out from his pocket a bunch of keys at the end of a steel chain, and limping across the room unlocked a cabinet and took out a box of cigars.

"My dear friend," said Moordius, selecting one with expert eye, "these were for your personal consumption and that occasionally of a friend of Moordius & Co. Why keep them?"

"I think better over a pipe," said Timothy.

Moordius lit his cigar and smiled: "Even so," said he, "I am not going yet to abandon my ambition."

"What's that?"

"To transform you into the Perfect Hedonist."

As Timothy—so remote were undistinguished Cambridge days—had but a vague notion of what a hedonist was, he made no answer, but settled himself in his luxurious writing-chair and looked expectantly at Moordius reclining in the visitor's arm-chair on his left. One of Moordius's *obiter dicta* came half irrelevantly into his mind:

"Always place the visitor's chair so that the occupant faces the light and so that you can turn round in yours and have your back to it."

It was only afterwards that he realized that, when the pleasant preliminaries of talk were over, Moordius rose deliberately, went round the writing-table in the great bay of the window, and having contemplated through the copper coloured air the dim outlines of the towers of Westminster, St. Thomas's Hospital and Lambeth Palace, turned suddenly with his back to the light.

"I've been thinking very seriously about Suzanne's

fortune, of which we are joint-trustees. Especially of her holdings in the Midland Citizens' Bank. What do you think of it?"

Timothy was mildly surprised by the unexpected question. As London agent for Moordius & Co. he had been effecting considerable financial operations through the medium of the Midland Citizens' Bank. In view of the depression of trade their last June balance sheet had been quite satisfactory. At the shareholders' meeting the report of the Directors had been unanimously adopted.

"It's as safe as the Bank of England."

Moordius shook his head almost imperceptibly and held up a white forefinger.

"What I am going to tell you is in strict confidence. A whisper from you in your position, might bring about the ruin of thousands of people."

"Good God!" cried Timothy, leaning forward with his elbows on the table. "What do you mean?"

"I have my doubts about that beautiful June balance sheet," said Moordius.

"But you're one of the Directors that passed it."

"Precisely. If I had known then what I'm pretty sure of now, I should not have agreed. Listen."

He entered into the broad details of a bank's unsound finance; inflated capital, dubious credits, the lure of an unjustifiable dividend. He overwhelmed Timothy with a gas-attack of statistical eloquence. Never had his voice been more honeyed and persuasive as he moved slowly to and fro, with occasional halts, in the window embrasure, smoking his long cigar, his figure but a black mass against the thick yellow lights of the outer world. He seemed to be a dim angel, a Heaven's High Commissioner, appointed to restore order out of chaos.

"What are you going to do?" asked Timothy, bewildered.

Moordius explained that he had already entered into most delicate and confidential negotiations, the aim of which was the withdrawal of Moordius & Co. from its connection with the Midland Citizens' Bank; a natural consequence being the resignation of his Directorship. There were commitments, he instanced, to a popular English Insurance Company with which Moordius & Co. as international bankers had no concern and of which they did not approve, the Star Guarantee Trust. It might be all right. But it might not. Since Jevons had become chairman of the Midland Citizens', the entire policy of the bank had changed. He distrusted Jevons. A broad-arrowed suit and food in a bowl eaten while he sat on a three-legged stool might possibly await Jevons in the not too distant future. Moordius warned him again:

"Of course, my dear Timothy, you must remember there are only two brains in the universe, yours and mine, through which these ideas have passed. Until I give the word, you must continue to clasp Jevons to your bosom."

"How can I if he's such a scoundrel?" asked Timothy.

Moordius leaned both knuckles on the table and smiled across at Timothy's perturbed face.

"I never said he was a scoundrel, Timothy. I only have my doubts of his probity. It's the principle, isn't it, of your English law to assume a man to be innocent until he's proved to be guilty?"

Timothy admitted the fact.

"The bank may be all right," Moordius went on. "It's your duty, as our London agent, to assume that it is. If Jevons comes to you, give him to understand that

it's a mere question of policy that is dividing us, and refer him to me. And that's as easy as falling off a log. Meanwhile, you and I, being Suzanne's trustees, can't afford to take any chances. That's why I've come to you at once."

"You mean," said Timothy, "we must sell out Suzanne's shares?"

Moordius nodded, passed round the table and put his hand on his agent's shoulder.

"As soon as possible. This afternoon," he added, after a pause, in his soft voice.

Timothy's brain reeled for a moment or two. The holdings in the bank which Suzanne inherited from old Joe Grabbiter amounted to some hundred and fifty thousand pounds. The handsome dividend declared in June and reinvested had added considerably to the immense total. He made obvious protest.

If such a block of shares were sold at once on the Stock Exchange by Moordius & Co., even in their fiduciary capacity, it would play the devil with the bank's credit.

Moordius looked regretfully at the two-inch stump of cigar beyond which the epicure dared not venture, and, as who should say: "Faithful Friend, Beloved Mistress, now that I have sucked from you the fine flower of your life, and not wishing to retain of you memories a shade less exquisite, I haven't any further use for you," threw it into the fire, with a philosophical, *sic transit* smile. Then he turned to Timothy.

"Why vulgar selling in open market? 'Transfer, the wise call it.' Of course it must go through a broker, but discreetly, my dear fellow."

He rose and stood again in the increasing gloom of the embrasure.

"There's a gentleman in North Britain——"

"Glasgow?"

"Ah?" smiled Moordius.

"Suzanne said——"

"What it pleased me to tell our dear ward. All realms are open to women nowadays, save one. The realm of finance. For all their progress it must remain a sealed book to them for a generation. You must agree that I practised on our dear Suzanne the most harmless of deceits. No, it was on her errand that I have spent two horrible nights in the Scotch express. If there is one thing in life that I love it's a bed, a bedroom bed, with bed-clothes warm and yet light, a pillow medium soft inclined at an exact angle, a hot water bottle at my feet, an even temperature, a window discreetly open to admit air without disconcerting bluster—— Well, well—— You can appreciate, my dear Timothy, the sacrifice I have made of two nights' comfort. But I am rewarded —indeed, we are rewarded. Our Scottish friend will take over all Suzanne's block of shares at a fraction above the steady Stock Exchange quotation which will have the effect of booming the credit of the Midland Citizens' Bank. What do you think of it?"

Timothy's simple mind was confused between two axioms. Axiom I: The sale of securities to B. by A. who had reason to believe them rotten, violated the elementary principles of honesty. Axiom II: Moordius could do no wrong. So Timothy hedged.

"What do you think of it yourself?"

Moordius threw up his hands. "My dear man, I think it one of the great coups of my life. Two birds with one stone. Don't you see? Lord Pitcairn——"

"Whew! Pitcairn——" Timothy fell back in his

chair. Who had not heard of the fabulous wealth and financial power of Lord Pitcairn?

"Yes," laughed Moordius. "He's the damnedest old fool that a cynical government ever elevated to a peerage. But in the world of finance his name is beneficent manure."

He exposed the transaction. The sensational purchase was the only hope for the credit of the bank; it was also to the amazing good fortune of Suzanne.

"I made the use of the word 'transfer' in playful mood of quotation," said he. "But it had its literal significance. The Anglo-French Exchange, as we both know, is just now hovering around its zenith. It's the great financial moment. In fact, my dear Timothy, I am suggesting the transfer of Suzanne's holding in the Midland Citizens' to Moordius & Co. in Paris."

"Have we the power?" asked Timothy.

"Of course. Who or what is to prevent us? The will specifically relieves us from Trustee securities. We have a free hand."

In spite of Timothy's implicit trust in Moordius, his old timorousness returned for the moment. A hundred and fifty thousand pounds was an enormous sum to juggle with in such airy fashion. If the Midland Citizens' Bank was unsound, the sooner Suzanne's money was out of it, the better. But the transference of it in block to Moordius & Co. seemed disconcertingly sudden. Besides, it was complicated by the possibility of Lord Pitcairn being put in the cart, a procedure which Moordius regarded as of no importance whatever.

"In such a big matter," said he, "don't you think we ought to consult Pye?"

Moordius burst out laughing and threw himself again into the arm-chair.

"Our horse-headed, rabbit-brained friend in Birmingham? God forbid! He would fumble over the thing for a year. As a matter of fact, the deal is practically through already. Your consent is all I'm waiting for. The inside of a week will see the whole thing accomplished. Why," said he, seeing Timothy passing a hand over a perplexed brow. "What are you worrying about? The stability of the hundred-year-old Moordius & Co.?"

"Good gracious, no!" cried Timothy, with the shocked air of a Neophyte who should be asked whether he doubted the Real Presence.

"Pitcairn? He's worth five million. If he loses the purchase money, he'll still be able to have bread and butter and a steam-yacht. But I don't think he will lose. He will take my place on the Board of Directors. His name—I've already told you what it means. It will be to his interest to keep the concern afloat until he dies. Oh, *mon cher vieux,*" he exclaimed, with his luminous smile, "really I'm rather hurt by what I think is passing through your mind. Pitcairn may be a fool; but I've used him *ad majorem Dei gloriam.* I've used him as an instrument for the succour of widows and orphans and the vicarious second establishments of unhappy married men—for they too are God's creatures—and the struggling greengrocer round the corner. Don't you see that I've assured the life of the Bank for some years?"

"I'm rather slow," said Timothy. "You must forgive me. It's always my way to count the lions before I see the path. But I think I understand now."

"Of course you must," laughed Moordius. He went on with his parable until he convinced Timothy that all

was for the best in the best of all possible financial worlds that came under the immediate guidance of Peter Moordius, sole head of the hundred-year-old banking house of Moordius et Compagnie.

"Now, having spent a perfectly idle morning," said Moordius, "we had better go out and lunch."

They lunched, and Moordius charmed Timothy with talk of the things in life which he loved best. Save Suzanne. Only here and there a cool reference to her in her quality of their joint ward. He betrayed no sign of the elderly lover; still less of the prospective husband. Timothy began to wonder, with a feeling of queer relief, whether the ninety-nine per centum of Suzanne had not been utterly mistaken. The thought gave edge to his appetite.

On the other hand, Moordius spoke largely of Valerie, and the rending of his father's heart since the glorious yet disastrous death of his son-in-law, Doon, and the extraordinarily beneficial influence of Timothy's visit.

"I can attribute the change in her only to your calm English sanity. You may not realize it, but at last she feels that she has found a friend. She likes Suzanne, of course. Who does not? But Suzanne is young and unspoiled, eager to absorb the wonder of the world. Being on different planes they cannot meet. But you—— She feels that you're on the same plane as herself. Some time ago, if you remember, I said I was sure you two would get on together. My words are amply justified—as far as Valerie is concerned. I wish, my dear Timothy, you could see more of her and exercise your gift of charming away her melancholia. She is always talking of your children—your daughter and niece—— Who knows? Very likely the thwarted maternal instinct

speaks. She has been clamouring to have them on a visit in Paris."

"She said something about it to me," said Timothy. "No doubt they would love it. I must consult Suzanne." Then a happy idea occurred to him. "Perhaps if Valerie came and stayed with us for a week or so and saw my small animals in their den, she might—well——" he laughed at his own humour—"she would not be buying little pigs in a poke."

"As ever, my dear Timothy," cried Moordius, "you anticipate my wishes. I did not dare make such a delicate suggestion."

He left Timothy contented with life and convinced of the perfect equity of the transaction, whereby Lord Pitcairn should purchase Suzanne's holdings in the Midland Citizens' Bank and the proceeds be reinvested at the high rate of exchange in the bank of Moordius & Co. of Paris.

Suzanne gave unheeding assent to the transfer. What should she know of business? If Moordius and Timothy could not manage her affairs, who could? Certainly not Suzanne Chastel. She took far greater interest in the approaching visit of Valerie. Whenever she thought of it, a dark little feminine smile played around the corners of her ironical lips. If those two could come together, it would be the solution of many difficulties. Valerie would return to sweet reason; Timothy would abandon his attitude of the love-sick but inarticulate troubadour; Naomi would have the mother which she so greatly needed; she herself by marrying Moordius would emerge from her fretting condition of tutelage; and with the whole lot of them, adults and children, so inter-related, there would be re-establishment of the family craved by her sub-

conscious French instinct. As an immediate interest she was curious to see Valerie outside the sphere of Moordius's influence.

Doubts besetting Timothy as to Valerie's comfort, Suzanne took command of the household, ordered a general bedroom post. Valerie should have her russet and green and vermilion room, she would sleep in her old nursery bedroom and Timothy would inhabit the sketchily furnished attic. Valerie's French maid, if she insisted on bringing her, could perch on a tree in the square. This had she written to Valerie. The maid refusing such elementary accommodation, and Moordius pleading the pressure of affairs, Valerie travelled alone.

They met a very flustered woman at Victoria, one rainy night. It was the first time in her life that Valerie had depended entirely on her own resources. The passport and custom crush at Calais had involved her in its idiotic and undignified scrimmage. The crossing had been terrible. The journey from Dover through the rain swishing hard against the carriage windows had been the most depressing thing on earth. Their faces, as she first caught sight of them, were the faces of angels. Suzanne took her to Montpellier Square, while Timothy waited with her keys, to collect the registered luggage.

Naomi, dark, bobbed-haired, lustrous-eyed, and Phoebe fair and apple-cheeked, were waiting on the first landing of the hall-stairs in shy anticipation of the new arrival. Suzanne, seeing them, sang out cheerily:

"Hullo, chicks, come and be polite."

They crept down gingerly, Naomi, as always, leading. She stood for a moment or two in front of the slender, dark, fur-mantled woman who held out her hand with a smile, while Suzanne introduced her as Naomi. Then

suddenly she took the proffered hand and clinging to it, said:

"Come upstairs and see my farmyard."

Valerie suffered herself to be led.

Phoebe, the first spasm of astonishment over, shouted:

"I'll come too."

But Suzanne grasped her by her plump little arm and whisked her into the dining-room, where, without a word of explanation and with calculated injudiciousness she fed her on crystallized fruit, so that after a while, regarding blissfully the unconsumed half of a lime, the section showing the mould of her young teeth:

"She can have her old farmyard," said Phoebe.

When Timothy, returning with the luggage, came in, Suzanne emerged from the dining-room door, and pointed up the stairs.

"You'd better go and see what's happening in the nursery."

He limped up, and, entering, saw the tired and still fur-coated Valerie in an arm-chair and on her lap Naomi, half the stock of the farmyard, many weird plush denizens of the nursery forest, and the whole contents of a vanity case.

"Naomi!" he began in a tone of rebuke.

But Valerie smiled at him.

"I never dreamed there could be anything so adorable in the whole wide world."

CHAPTER XV

TIMOTHY did not clasp Jevons, as Moordius had counselled, to his bosom; he did his best to reject him as a calumniator. Jevons, of course, came to him to learn the meaning of the extraordinary *coup de théâtre* planned so long beforehand and executed with such flabbergasting suddenness. Transfers of vast blocks of shares in a sensitive going concern like a great bank were not made without a reason. What was it?

Timothy, the financier, speaking in his own luxurious atmosphere of finance, did not feel called on to give a reason. Moordius and himself, as trustees of Miss Chastel's fortune, were free to place her money to the best advantage. Jevons retorted by asking where they would get a higher rate of interest on equal security. Timothy contented himself by hinting at the possible insecurity, during these uncertain days, of the Midland Citizens' Bank.

Jevons, a florid, cheerful man, grew almost apoplectic with astonishment and indignation. The Midland Citizens' Bank unsound? Had he taken the trouble to go into the last balance sheet? Timothy, as a chartered accountant, was welcome to audit every book of the bank. It was a ludicrous suggestion. Of course it came from Moordius. But if Moordius had suspicions, was it a very honourable proceeding to put the man from Glasgow in the cart? He used the same phrase as Timothy, wherefore Timothy's qualms returned. He remembered, however, Moordius's explanation. He echoed it to Jevons.

Lord Pitcairn was an unexpected tower of financial strength to the bank.

"Look here, Swayne," said Jevons suddenly, "are you going to transfer all this capital to Moordius & Co. in Paris?"

"I don't see that it's any concern of yours," said Timothy.

"But it is of yours. I speak as a friend. I give you warning. Don't do it."

"Why?" asked Timothy, sinking further into the depths of his soft writing-chair, his back to the light. "Are you attacking the credit of a great banking-house a hundred years old?"

Jevons was attacking nothing. He merely, perhaps impertinently, was suggesting that from the Trustees' point of view—perhaps—er—War Loan would be a sounder investment.

Timothy could not but mark the ironical note and the sneer of calumny. He conceived a sudden loathing for Jevons and would have liked to kick him out of the office. But chairmen of great banks are not usually kicked out of offices. They are powerful folk, and in retaliation might find a speedy way of kicking you out of the financial world.

"Did that loan, a couple of months ago, which your people tried to negotiate, inspire you with confidence?" Jevons asked after a while.

"What loan? No negotiations passed through this office."

"Then perhaps I'd better say nothing about it. I don't know, though. Anyhow it was a couple of hundred thousand. We couldn't finance it, not because we hadn't

got the money, but because we didn't think Moordius & Co. were good enough."

"If that is so," said Timothy coldly, "I don't see why you've come to ask me for reasons. They're obvious."

"Perhaps they are," said Jevons, "I came as a friend. Moordius is the most fascinating and delightful fellow in Europe, and not the man to pull through big deals out of personal pique."

He smiled comfortably, having recovered from his indignation at the suggestion of the unsoundness of the Midland Citizens' Bank, and rose.

"Well, so long. I'm glad we've had this little chat. Naturally I thought you knew all about the loan. No. Don't bother. I can find my way out."

He departed on a cheerful nod, leaving Timothy at first wrathful and then vaguely uneasy. No; perhaps vaguely hurt would be the better definition of his feelings. Surely operations of such importance in London should have come through the London Agency. He had experienced the humiliation of the false position. For the first time he felt angry with his god. Moordius might have given him a hint.

He told Moordius so, the next time he came over from Paris on one of his lightning visits.

"My dear old sensitive fellow," said Moordius, with a comforting hand on his arm. "Of course, of course. But the preliminaries of such things are dead secrets between principals. The moment it had gone beyond the preliminary stage, the negotiation would have been placed in your hands. Jevons has been guilty of a serious breach of trust. He couldn't lend because he couldn't touch the money which as I told you is all tied up in the

Star Guarantee Trust and other wild-cat companies. I saw they were at their wit's ends and so swept both myself and Suzanne out of it."

"But," said Timothy, with a pucker of the brow, "Moordius & Co. did want to negotiate the loan."

"Why naturally." Moordius spoke as one does to a child undoubtful of the stork or cabbage-patch theory of babies. "Obligations have to be met by banks even more scrupulously than by human beings. You know how the tumbling-down of the Italian banks affected us—well, well. We got the money from Belgium next day. Now, of course, all is fair sailing."

He uttered other words of reassurance which for a time left Timothy comforted. After all, he told himself, he was in a subordinate position. Moordius had never undertaken to take him into the confidence of the powerful banking house of Moordius & Co. He had seen enough of international banking to realize its delicacy. Its fingers were on the responsive keys of the exchanges of the world. But still, uneasiness lingered at the back of Timothy's mind. Two facts worried him. Suzanne's holdings in the Midland Citizens' Bank amounted nearly to the loan which they had refused, and hard-headed old Lord Pitcairn was the last man in the world to be induced to bolster up a rotten concern.

He turned for reassurance as to the charm of life to sweeter domestic things. Even matter-of-fact Timothy could not fail to be struck by something of the romantic in his immediate scheme of existence. Once the feminine element in his household had overwhelmed his timidity. Now it exhilarated him. His new standards had rendered his attitude ever so little sultanesque. What youngish widower in London could enter his house and find await-

ing him not only a couple of adoring girl children, but a couple of young and attractive women, in no way related to him, who seemed to make it the business of their lives to minister to his happiness? Suzanne was the same Suzanne that she had ever been—gay, ironical, elusive, dominant; ruling the children, ruling the servants, ruling Timothy, ruling Valerie, all (in Timothy's eyes) with her fresh air of the spring goddess whose fragrant though sometimes pungent word (in Timothy's ears) must be the law of the universe. Suzanne was the same. But Valerie had suffered the sea-change of twenty miles of channel. After a day or two, a different Valerie disclosed herself both to Suzanne and Timothy. She was like a woman who had walked out from the gloom into the daylight. She was no longer the kimono-clad creature of languor with the defiance of the hunted animal haunting her dark eyes. She became a Valerie whom Suzanne had never seen before; a Valerie who, one night in Paris, had half revealed herself to Timothy. With Naomi and Phoebe she conducted herself amazingly. At the same time did child respond to child and child to instinctive mother. She begged them of Suzanne, with the air of one borrowing a pearl necklace. She took them to every den of childish debauchery she could think of—Madame Tussauds, the Zoo, Maskelyne & Devant, cinemas, tea places, toy shops. Under the influence of the two or three pantomimes to which they had been taken in January and February, their interest in pugilism and fencing had waned and they had developed a histrionic fervour. They invented plays in which they were remarkable personages, for preference Oriental princes and princesses, and dressed up in whatever scattered bits of finery they could glean. Valerie spent a happy day with them in the

dingy recesses of a theatrical costumier's and came away with a boxful of tinsel wonderment. They adored her.

"Save for the Judgment Seat and the Rod I'm out of it," laughed Suzanne. "I can escape and attend to my affairs and enjoy myself and leave everybody perfectly happy."

"Not quite everybody," said Timothy, to whom the remark was addressed.

"You've got to get used to things, *mon cher,*" she said —and went off to enjoy herself. For she had many friends from Paris and Aix and Biarritz, and, after some months of Montpellier Square, had found an excessive spell of solitude unnecessary for meditative purposes.

Timothy, not knowing that he was the perfect lover, at first sighed, then rated himself for an ungrateful dog. It was not as though Suzanne was for ever gadding about. There were hours on end in which he sunned himself in her radiance, and in her absence the glow of her last smile still lingered. . . . And then there was the gracious friendship of the metamorphosed woman who was his guest. In a way she fascinated him by her dark and brooding beauty. He could not but feel the warmth of her like the breath of a Southern spring. She was all youth and the subtle simplicity of shadow in green woods asleep in the sunshine. In this swift reaction of his being, to any man less prepossessed than Timothy, she would have been irresistible.

"I've never seen such a transformation in a human creature," said Timothy to Suzanne.

Suzanne replied sagely: "It's just the change. The change from the surroundings that always suggested to her the *idée fixe.* Moordius has always wanted her to go away and find fresh interests; but she has refused.

We've talked of it over and over again. This according to Moordius is what she used to be before the war. Now you see. The children. You."

"I?"

"You don't suppose people run up against Timothys every day in the week, do you?"

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"Do you think you're like any man Valerie has ever met? My dear old thing," she said with a laugh which had a touch of tenderness in it, "don't you know you're unique?"

She left him puzzled. Unique? He was the most commonplace, dullest fellow in the world. If he went into society, every man shone save only he, the consciousness of which had been the secret humiliation of the last few months of success. In that way, perhaps, he was unique. Not a matter, however, for arrogant pride.

Yet he could not help perceive that Valerie took pleasure from his company. No man, if the woman is agreeable and fair-favoured, can make such a discovery without gratification. They had long talks together, about what he scarcely knew; mainly, perhaps, about the children and their ways and their clothes and the little intimacies of the home in Montpellier Square. Of France and Moordius she scarcely spoke. Nor did Timothy, knowing that, in his wisdom, Moordius had prescribed this rest in London as a cure for a fretted spirit. Well, the cure was progressing wonderfully.

Once she said: "You can't conceive what being here is doing for me. I feel so well. I should like to stay for ever."

"We should be only too delighted to have you for as

long as you like," Timothy replied, in his kind, solemn way.

Whereat Valerie's cheek flushed and turned from him eyes in which some confusion had crept. Timothy had no idea of the appeal which the uniqueness of his simplicity made to the tired and tortured woman. That she was ready then and there to marry him, cherish him, protect him from overshadowing evil, give the whole of her starved heart to him and the children, he had not the faintest suspicion. Had any one, Suzanne for instance, suggested such a thing, he would have been the most astounded man alive. Suzanne, often tempted, knew the wisdom of reticence. A shy bird like Timothy might be frightened off to the inaccessible perch of a club bedroom. Far better, for the present, to let the fascination of the new Valerie work its subtle way.

Meanwhile Timothy, living under these feminine influences, was the happiest of men, petted, cared for, spoiled, amused. With Suzanne and Valerie he saw the performance at Hammersmith of "The Beggar's Opera." He enjoyed it mightily. Sitting sidewise on the little seat of the homeward taxi, he suddenly burst into laughter and nearly broke the window with his head.

"What's the joke?" they asked him.

He couldn't explain. It was something in the play that had tickled his sense of humour.

" 'How happy could I be with either?' " Valerie asked calmly.

"Certainly not," cried Timothy, with sudden reaction from mirth.

The immediate personal allusion shocked him. He did not reproach Suzanne, chartered libertine of splendid indelicacies. But—*on ne badine pas avec l'amour.* Su-

zanne to him was everything. Valerie nothing—from the Macheath point of view. The insinuation covered him with indignant confusion.

Both the women—could they help it?—broke into peals of laughter.

"Now we know where we are. Turned down flat. Timothy, darling, you're a perfect dream."

So Suzanne.

"Why be so fierce about it?" asked Valerie. "Are we not good enough for you?"

They grew hysterical over his Galahad incomprehensibility. The more he tried to explain his point of view, the more they laughed. One was Polly Peachum, the other Lucy Lockit, which was which? And then Timothy in his gentle, unhumorous way began to laugh too, not knowing why.

In the dining-room of Montpellier Square, where sandwiches and liquids awaited them, Suzanne threw herself exhaustedly into a chair.

"I don't know when I've laughed so much."

Timothy ministered to their wants. There was an interval of sobriety during which they discussed the play and ate and drank and smoked.

At the moment of parting for the night, Valerie said:

"You haven't yet accounted for your laughter in the taxi."

"It's very simple," said Timothy. "Any man would have been a dull chap if it hadn't struck him as funny. I counted up the things of your sex in this house—even the cat—and everything done for me—and that song"—he worked his elbows up and down—"the barn-door cock crowing. Well—it was devilish funny, you know."

He was so serious, so anxious to convince, so remote

from the pretty naughtinesses in their woman's thoughts, that they both, Suzanne giving the lead, threw their arms round his neck and kissed him with bewildering suddenness, and fled, like schoolgirls, banging the door behind them.

Timothy lit a pipe and poured out a whisky and soda, and drank it in an obfuscated state of mind. He pondered over their merriment.

"I suppose I must be some sort of brand of dam'-fool," said he.

Then he felt their kisses and the soft touch of bare arms on his cheek.

"Or perhaps that's where my uniqueness comes in."

He sat soberly envisaging the deliciousness of his immediate life. Then the picture of the actor flapping his wings, as the cock before the chorus of hens, again struck his queer fancy and he laughed out loud.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"And they didn't think it funny. People say that women have no sense of humour. I wonder if it's true."

Whereupon he turned out the lights and went up to bed in his little attic room.

A day or two afterwards, Suzanne coming into his library, ostensibly for a book, asked him outright:

"Timothy, why don't you marry Valerie?"

His jaw fell and he echoed her question.

"Marry Valerie? Good God, why should I?"

"People marry for all sorts of reasons. Widowers often do it to provide a new mother for their children. Ordinary men also find some attraction in beautiful women."

She sat down in the arm-chair and lit a cigarette and regarded him in her cool way.

"Valerie is a charming and beautiful woman, isn't she? Besides she has the maternal instinct."

"Of course, of course," said Timothy, looking very uncomfortable. "But such a thing never entered my head."

"All the more reason for it to do so now."

In dismay he sought refuge in the first consideration to hand. It took two to make a marriage. Valerie had never dreamed of looking on him as a possible husband. It was ludicrous. If he suggested such a thing she would be justified in walking straight out of the house.

"She wouldn't walk," said Suzanne.

"She'd run," he declared.

Suzanne shook her head.

"She'd stay; ask her."

This time it was Timothy who shook his head.

"My dear, I'm an old-fashioned fellow, and believe that if you ask a woman to marry you, you've first got to give her to understand that you're in love with her."

"Unless she gives you to understand that she's in love with you."

Timothy limped about the room, his livid face one corrugation of perplexity. Her suggestion was preposterous. Of course he had heard of amorous aberrations of beautiful dames. He knew his Shakespeare. Titania loved the ass-headed Bottom. But for that there had been reason. The lady, Puck-driven, was not right in her mind.

The wayward thought was like an arrow of flame through his heart. He reddened, conscious of a monstrous indelicacy. Had not that been Moordius's consistent explanation of Valerie's behaviour? The tragedy of her husband's death had touched her brain, the malady expressing itself in irrational enmity against the man

she supposed to be her father. Here, in Montpellier Square, away from the unhappily detested presence, the real sweet nature of the woman had unfolded, as from shrivelled bud to blossom. But the taint, or whatever it was, persisted. That was Timothy's only solution of an inexplicable mystery.

For such is the way of that group of men, much larger than is popularly believed, who are as individualistic as women in their response to the call of sex. In the scale of manhood, the Don Juan is at one end and they are at the other. In general, it is a question not of virility, but of spirituality. For them facile corporeal acquirement has little meaning, especially if they can bring triumphantly no conscious physical quality of strength or beauty or any conscious quality of intellectual or artistic fascination. They form the vast herd of timid, sensitive males; and they have been the prey of predatory females since the world began. Had not Timothy himself been married out of hand, almost against his will? To this Timothy gave never a thought.

To understand Timothy, we have to regard him in the sexual twilight in which his kind have their being, and yet as a strongly individualized member of the group—nay, more, perhaps its typical flower—conscious of physical deformity, of intellectual commonplace, of deadly social dull-dog-ism; a man's man as the phrase goes, happy in his talk with men of boxing and billiards and the probable winner of the next day's horse-race, condemned by queer chance to a home-environment overwhelmingly feminine, down to the ever fecund domestic cat; a creature less cognizant of feminine wiles and guiles than a he-hedgehog bred in captivity, but a human being with a reflecting brain, setting woman as a race apart en-

dowed with sacred delicacies of sentiment and unfathomable mysteries of emotion, changeable yet constant as the sea, obeying immutable laws; rooted in the fundamentals of existence, and therefore divine and wonderful. If the woman he loved had responded, he would have accepted the glorious miracle. But that a beautiful woman, in full possession of her faculties, should throw herself, unasked, at his feet, was a conception transcending his modest philosophy. There remained, therefore, the solution aforesaid. It was indescribably painful.

To hint such a thing to a living soul was obviously impossible.

"My dear Suzanne," said he, after a while, "if you wish to please me you'll never mention this again." And lest she should glean a wisp of his motives, he took his courage in both hands and said: "You know perfectly well there's only one woman in the world I love."

She flushed and replied kindly: "That's absurd."

"The *reductio ad absurdum* is generally the end of most propositions in life," said he.

She rose, and coming to him put her hands on his shoulders.

"I'm sorry, old thing, that the other idea won't work. It would be such a lovely arrangement. We should have been just one big family. Don't you see what I mean?"

He read the message in her shining eyes.

"You've made up your mind to marry Moordius?"

"We've fixed it up, subject, of course, to your consent."

Timothy shrugged his shoulders, with a little laugh:

"My consent!" said he.

"Peter's coming to talk to you about it next week."

"What has to be, must be," said Timothy sadly.

CHAPTER XVI

A CHANCE word or two overheard in the city club luncheon room whither an acquaintance had led him, caused Timothy great distress. Two men were talking rather loudly at the next table about Monte Carlo. A name suddenly pronounced arrested his attention.

"Moordius was there—playing the great game. *Trente-et-quarante.* I saw him lose twenty thousand."

"Francs?"

"No—don't be silly. Pounds. They say he has lost a fortune this last year. Nichoula was with him, roped in pearls, descending out of sight, which is saying a good deal these days. A couple of fortunes on her, at least. How his bank stands it, God only knows."

The other man laughed. "Apparently his bank doesn't stand it. It's on the rocks. There are all sorts of rumours in Paris."

Timothy suddenly white with anger, half rose and, his hand on the back of his chair, leaned across to his neighbours.

"Pardon me—I couldn't help hearing your conversation. I happen to be a partner in Messrs. Moordius & Co., and what you say is utterly untrue, and spoken in a public place is libellous."

The two well-fed, peaceful Britons apologized. The one admitted he was a fool for repeating gossip of which he knew not the foundation; the other took refuge in the notoriety of Moordius as a gambler and the evidence of his own eyes which followed a disastrous evening of Moor-

dius's play. But he fully recognized that Moordius the individual and the institution of Moordius & Co. were two entirely different propositions. Like his friend he unreservedly withdrew any imputation against the credit of the bank.

Being at the coffee and cigar stage of their lunch, they went away very soon afterwards.

"Isn't it damnable?" said Timothy to his host, one Murgatroyd, an elderly money-broker, and a fellow-member of the National Sporting Club, who had asked Timothy to lunch just because he liked him.

"It is," the other admitted. "Talk like that should be whispered, not shrieked."

"But whispered it's damnable."

"To be quite frank, our friend Moordius is asking for it," replied the elderly money-broker, whose thin brown face, sharp eyes, white moustache and white imperial gave him the air of a late Victorian diplomatist. "There are professions, businesses, and trades which demand a special social discretion. No medical man, for instance, dare acquire the reputation of a libertine. In a provincial town corpses would not be entrusted to an undertaker who was a notorious drunkard. You wouldn't employ a cook who only lived to dance her life away. We could multiply instances. Much more then, the head of a great banking house is indiscreet in establishing himself as the most fantastic, and a rumour has had it lately, as the most inconceivably unsuccessful gambler in Europe."

"But is that true?" asked Timothy.

"What?"

"What you've just been telling me—about his gambling?"

"Of course. His name in the gambling world is as much of a household word as that of Carpentier or Joe Beckett to you and me. I'm not repeating gossip," he added with a smile, "like our late friends at the next table. I know."

Murgatroyd was a man of unblemished repute. He had the old-fashioned air of authority combined with charm. From his opinions one might differ. But his facts were facts incontrovertible.

"But twenty thousand pounds at a sitting! It passes imagination."

"It's only a million francs at the present rate of exchange. Only a hundred bundles of *'elastiques'* each containing ten thousand francs. If you take an *elastique* as your unit or counter, and have vile luck, a hundred of them soon goes."

Timothy's head began to swim. The hateful uneasiness which his talk a while ago with Jevons had left in his mind returned. He fiddled nervously with the stem of his wineglass.

"After all," said he, "Moordius is a very wealthy man and can afford it. His personal fortune and the banking establishment are two perfectly separate things."

"They ought to be," replied Murgatroyd, with his shrewd eyes fixed on him. "And I wouldn't dream of saying they're not. But as a matter of theory Messrs. Moordius & Co. are competent to make heavy advances to Mr. Peter Moordius on securities of which Mr. Peter Moordius approves. Obvious, isn't it?" he remarked with a smile. "That's why his card gambling and his international exchange gambling—on his own account, of course—and his stock exchange gambling, are so injudicious. But—I'm on very delicate ground. I'm only

commenting on the idle gossip of our late neighbours."

"There's not a word of truth in their insinuations."

"I sincerely hope not," said Murgatroyd.

"As for the woman roped in pearls," said Timothy, "that's the damnedest of lies. I know his private life as intimately as my own."

Murgatroyd smiled. "I've heard nothing at all about the lady."

And that was the end of the matter. But Timothy went home hating himself for disloyal suspicion.

The week passed and no Moordius came to make formal demand for Mademoiselle Chastel's hand in marriage. Suzanne explained.

"Peter writes that he's up to his neck in work."

Timothy passed through miserable days. No man, however Timothesque, can contemplate without anguish the signing away to another of the lady of his adoration, especially when he has absolute power to refuse the signature. He was content with little. Married to him, Suzanne would have been the earth, sun, moon and stars. Unmarried, the sun, moon and stars—the earth to us mortals being exceedingly satisfactory. But married to Moordius—just moon and stars, a pretty but very chilly and unsatisfying appanage to existence. And then, there was Valerie. His opened eyes saw the promise in hers of everything which a man could wish. His hideous solution held him tongue-tied, embarrassed, self-detesting. Finally there were the rumours of the insecurity of Moordius & Co., and his struggles to defend his faith in Moordius before a sceptical world. He felt as though the founts of his life had been poisoned. As often as he could he shut himself up in his library, and readdicted himself to the solving of acrostics in the Sunday papers.

Once Valerie challenged him.

"You're quite different, Timothy. What's the matter? Do tell me."

Of course Timothy denied that anything was the matter. She laughed.

"You're too transparent; any one could see that something's worrying you. What is it? Business?"

"Oh, no, no. Nothing, I assure you," said Timothy.

And after a little fencing she came out with—to him—the diabolical suggestion:

"You're losing faith in my father. I wish to God you'd lose it altogether. I know nothing of his business. But I do know that he wants Suzanne's fortune. If you let him have it you'll be a fool."

"My dear," said Timothy, "I'm afraid I can't listen to you. Suzanne is going to marry your father."

She laughed scornfully. Timothy realized that her dark eyes were singularly expressive.

"No wonder you're worried! Oh, my dear friend, I know all about it. The whole thing's comic opera—from one point of view. Of course I'm prejudiced——"

"Unhappily," said Timothy.

A ripple shivered through her bare shoulders. They were alone in the drawing-room after dinner, Suzanne having gone off in pursuit of gaiety.

"Very unhappily," she said. "That's why I'm warning you. They'll have to be married under French law. Do you know anything about French law?"

"Nothing at all," he admitted.

"In your position as Trustee you had better get the most authoritative advice. There are three systems of marriage-contracts in France. The only one which protects a woman's interests is what they call *séparation*

des biens. Under that, the wife's property is entirely under her control. When you talk to my father, insist on that and see what he'll say."

"I'll take your advice," said Timothy, and to put an end to a distressing conversation, set the table for Rubicon Bézique, a game into whose fascination he had been lately initiated at his club.

It seemed as if the devil was in it. Every day brought some new distrust of Moordius and Company. At the Kingsway office business was unaccountably stagnant. There were hesitations in the acceptance of bills. The astute Soussouki summoned to consultation gave as reasons the tense political situation which set the variations in internatioual exchanges beyond the prophetic wit of man. He talked, verbose and statistically learned, of things that passed Timothy's understanding. Nothing could be got out of Soussouki. Jevons, chance met in Simpson's, wished him good luck in a tone unmistakably ironical. Murgatroyd summoned him one day to friendly but mysterious confabulation in his office, where, in guarded terms, he bade him beware of Moordius, whose Paris operations had gone far beyond the sphere of practical banking.

Timothy was worried to death.

Moordius came over at last; appeared in the Kingsway office, grey-vested, pink, smiling. He wrung Timothy's hand with both his and expressed his delight at seeing the dear old fellow again. Timothy's conscience smote him. How could he have been so disloyal as to distrust this apostle of benevolence, this reeker of prosperity?

"I've seen Suzanne this morning," said he, "in fact, we've lunched together. She has told you the glad tidings. Glad for me, at any rate. This is my first

opportunity of discussing the matter with you. You congratulate me, I'm sure."

"Of course, of course," said Timothy.

"So I hope your consent, necessary according to the ridiculous will, is only a matter of formality."

"If you and Suzanne want to get married, I don't see what I can do to prevent it," said Timothy.

Moordius laughed, as though Timothy had finely jested. He wore the gay air of the bridegroom-elect, while Timothy, conscientious, strove to strangle a mortal jealousy.

"That's all right," cried Moordius. "There'll be all sorts of lawyer's business to be gone through before the final signing. But the principle's the thing." He wrung his hand again. "Thank you so much, my dear Timothy. Can you wonder that I'm the happiest of men?"

"You ought to be," said Timothy.

"I just ran in," said Moordius, gathering up grey hat and grey gloves. "Suzanne's in the car downstairs. Don't come out, please. I want just a word with Soussouki. You're dining with me tonight. My old friend, the Princess Rostaroff, is coming."

He danced away, almost blowing Timothy a kiss, fifty on the happy feet of fifteen. The last man in the world to be on the brink of ruin.

The dinner was delightful—as far as his heart could find delight in such a betrothal party. They were only four, Valerie had chosen to stay at home, having quite enough, she declared, of her father in Paris. But her absence was unregretted. The Princess, a woman of forty-five, who had escaped from Russia with her diamonds hidden in the thick coils of her hair, and her emeralds and sapphires secreted in the heels of her boots,

held Timothy captive by the tales of the New Bohemianism in which Russians of her class were involved. Moordius was his urbanest self. Suzanne glowed. The fact of the betrothal feast proclaimed itself with the most delicate discretion. No tasteless parade of loverdom disturbed Timothy's enjoyment of the passing hour. In the homeward bound limousine he grew eloquent in praise of the Princess's fascination.

In the hall of his house he was spared the distress of the lovers parting. Suzanne held out a frank hand to each:

"You two want to have a talk, I know. I'm for bed. Good night."

On each she shed an impartial smile and tripped upstairs. The two men watched her disappear at the turn of the landing. Then Moordius, with customary gesture, laid his hand on Timothy's shoulder and said with a sigh:

"Ah, all I hope is that she knows her own mind. If I were twenty years younger such a thought would not enter my head. Youth is so triumphantly egotistical. But at fifty, happiness like this staggers a man."

Timothy, having a heartful of things to say, to which he could not give utterance, murmured a vague assent to the proposition, and led the way down the passage to the nondescript den which he called his library. Moordius poured himself out a drink, and waved to Timothy to do likewise.

"Do you know," said he, "you did not drink to my happiness at dinner. Won't you do so now?"

Timothy nodded vaguely and raised his glass. He was suffering from sudden reaction. Moordius, exquisite in his pearl-studded fine linen, beautifully cut clothes,

pearl-buttoned white waistcoat, pink, fresh, prosperous, struck a wrong note in that dingy and ramshackle room, with its cracked leather arm-chairs and sofa and its cheap bookcases half filled with untidy volumes, and its general poverty-stricken air. Jealousy again gripped at Timothy's heart. A dog-in-the-manger sentiment, no doubt; but hay has other sweet uses besides that of nourishing horses. Much can be said for the poor comfortable dog fabulously held up for execration. . . .

Suddenly too, he felt that Moordius was incongruous not only with the setting but with himself. All that Moordius represented of wealth and power and luxury was alien to his habit of thought, his instinctive way of life. To Moordius the atmosphere of champagne and bare feminine shoulders in which he seemed to pass a glorified existence might be natural; to him, Timothy, it was artificial. He could never reach the ten pound standard.

Moordius settled himself comfortably in an arm-chair.

"I wonder," said he, "whether you have at hand a list of Suzanne's investments?"

Timothy started at the unexpected question. Another pang. Suzanne married, she would automatically enter into possession of her fortune and his trusteeship would be at an end. Even that poor, yet intimate, link with her would be snapped.

"Oh, yes. Of course," said he, and fished the paper out of a locked drawer.

Moordius scanned it through his gold-rimmed glasses, with which, after a while, he tapped it amiably.

"Don't you think, my dear Timothy, that at the present day, all this is rather old-fashioned? New Zealand

three and a halfs, Dominion of Canada . . . English Railways. . . ." He ran over various items. "Half of the miserable return swallowed up by English income tax."

"What would you suggest?" asked Timothy, after listening to a detailed criticism of the investments.

"Why not get free of this English incubus? Suzanne and I are French subjects."

Timothy argued that the investments were as sound as the British Empire. Moordius playfully questioned the soundness of this (to Britons) Divine Institution guaranteed by the Bank of Heaven. Only the monarchical sentiment bound it together, a gossamer strand liable to be broken at any moment. His dear Timothy must forgive the wounding of English susceptibilities; but he spoke philosophically as a citizen of the world and technically as a citizen of France. He had, of course, mentioned the matter to Suzanne, who, although willing to leave the manipulation of her fortune entirely in their hands—besides she had no choice—had expressed the wish that France rather than England should benefit by her capital.

"The recuperative force of France is such," said Moordius, with bland audacity, "that in a year's time the rate of exchange will reach normal. I know. The whole banking world knows. By selling out and transferring to France, we double Suzanne's capital."

For the first time Timothy doubted the astuteness of his benefactor. For the first time a suspicion of Moordius's good faith stained his candid soul. The Anglo-French exchange, in the present convulsed state of international politics and of international finance getting back

to normal in a year! Moordius must be a visionary or take him for a fool. He stuffed and lit a pipe and limped about the room, while a gathering surmise dawned bleakly on his mind.

"Do you propose," said he, at last, "that we should transfer the rest of Suzanne's fortune to Moordius & Co.?"

"It would be certainly to her interest," said Moordius, with his benevolent smile, as though he were showering indulgence on his bride-elect.

But Timothy, troubled, asked: "Why this hurry? Why not wait until she is mistress of her own affairs—which happens when she marries?"

"Obviously, my dear Timothy, as a man of honour, I should prefer it to be all settled before our marriage. As trustees and guardians, you and I take an impartial view of the interests of our ward. As a husband, coming under French law into half the fortune of my wife, my position would naturally be a delicate one."

"Did you say half the fortune?" asked Timothy, laying his pipe on the table.

"Of course."

"But there is the system of the *séparation des biens,* which means that the wife retains her fortune."

Moordius laughed and made a gesture dismissing the childishness of Timothy's suggestion.

"My dear fellow, there are things—quite legal—which are not done, and that is one of them. Suzanne would never consent to such an arrangement."

Timothy took up his pipe again and relit the end of tobacco which remained. His fingers shook slightly. Valerie was right in prophesying that her father would re-

pudiate the separation of property contract. He stood for a while, in anxious thought, sucking at his pipe and staring absently at the headlines of the unopened evening paper on his desk.

"You surely can have no objection?" said Moordius in his softest voice.

"I should like to feel that Suzanne is free to do what she likes with her own money. It's my English way of looking at things."

"Well, well," smiled Moordius, "doubtless we'll come to an understanding. The *entente cordiale* still survives. And you have the whip hand of us. Your consent is necessary. Otherwise, if we married, the money goes—where?—To a lost dogs' home—God knows." He looked sharply at Timothy, who still stood by the table with anxious face averted. "What's really troubling you, dear friend?" he asked. "You're involved in the financial side of it. I quite realize. So does Suzanne. We've decided that you shan't lose by this sudden determination of your trusteeship."

Timothy slowly turned, and for the first time since their first meeting stared at Moordius, free from the spell of his fascination. It seemed as though, suddenly, he had been touched by the unclean. All the years of his puritan uprightness spoke in revolting protest.

"Suzanne can't think I'm such a cad as to be influenced——"

"No, no," Moordius interrupted soothingly. "Of course not. You, the soul of honour, if ever there was one."

"If there's such a suspicion in your mind," cried Timothy unmollified, "I'll give you my consent in writing straight away."

He took up a pen and dipped it in the ink and sought for paper on his untidy table. Standing he wrote:

"I consent to the marriage of my ward, Suzanne Chastel, with my co-trustee, Peter Moordius, under the system of *'séparation des biens.'*
TIMOTHY SWAYNE."

"There!" said he, leaving the wet sheet on his blotting-pad.

Moordius, who had regarded him with an amused smile, rose and led him away, and gently forced him into the arm-chair on the other side of the fireplace.

"You'll tear up that foolish document of melodrama, my dear Timothy. Your word's your bond, and that you've already given. Again I repeat my appreciation of your delicate sensitiveness. We'll discuss this marriage settlement affair later. It's the other question that's more important for the moment."

"What other question?"

"Why, the reinvestment of Suzanne's fortune."

"In Moordius & Co.?"

"Precisely."

"I'm afraid," said Timothy, "I can't agree."

"I'm afraid, my dear young friend," said Moordius mockingly, "that you'll damned well have to."

Timothy sat on the edge of the old arm-chair, hunched up, his chin in his hands, and looked hard at Moordius, and Moordius looked hard at him. And as Timothy looked, it seemed as if the smiling mask fell from Moordius and left visible a cruel hawk's face with cruel eyes and features drawn down into a small expressionless mouth. A shiver passed through him, the shiver of horror at finding himself in the presence of something evil. Beyond Valerie's hatred and the recent city rumours, he

had little logical foundation for this revulsion of his being. The revelation was subconscious, instinctive. And yet, in spite of it all, or because of it all, he had no sense of his natural timidity; on the contrary, he felt uplifted, curiously combatant.

"Why shall I have to?"

"Because our interests demand it."

"*Our* interests?"

"Mine and yours."

"I don't quite understand you," said Timothy.

"What business interests have you outside Moordius & Co.? You are identified with us to the extent of far more than your last penny."

The sweat broke out on Timothy's forehead. Moordius had stated the position with diabolical exactness. The implied threat was unmistakable. The end of Moordius & Co. meant for him bankruptcy, ruin, starvation, all the unknown terrors of a dishonoured life.

"You mean, if Moordius & Co. failed——" he began.

Moordius interrupted him sharply. "What folly are you talking? Moordius & Co. failing? Absurd. You've been listening to all the old wives' tales in the City of London."

"There oughtn't to be any," said Timothy.

Moordius rose with a laugh and a sudden resumption of geniality.

"There oughtn't to be all sorts of lunatic things in this sober world." He put a hand on Timothy's shoulder. "Why not trust me to look after the welfare of the two beings I love so much, Suzanne and yourself—to say nothing of my own and Valerie's? I assure you"—he spoke as one speaks to a doubting child—"there's not one of us who won't profit by the transference I propose.

We can call it settled, can't we?" He pulled out his watch. "It's getting late. Good night, my dear fellow."

He turned to the writing table and took up the sheet on which Timothy had written his consent to the marriage and, without looking at it, put it in his pocket-book.

"Better not to leave this lying about."

Timothy followed him into the hall, where Moordius lit a fresh cigar, and helped him on with his overcoat; then through the door to the waiting car. The little decorous square was quite still. From the Fulham Road and further Knightsbridge came the muffled murmur of traffic. A fine rain was falling and the reflection of the street lamp a few doors up fell golden brown on the wet pavement and silvery on the polished roof of the limousine, whose headlights flared illumination down the roadway. Within the car a shaded electric bulb glowed discreetly, yet enough to show the luxurious fittings and the bouquet of carnations in the silver holder. Moordius entered, the chauffeur arranged the light rug round his knees. Timothy, standing on the doorstep in the rain, curiously sensitive to the wet on a thinning patch of his crown, saw him framed in the window, bland, smiling and triumphant, the big cigar stuck less into his mouth than into a characterless hole in his face between nose and chin, and was again seized with a sudden hatred of the insolent evil of the man. He rushed down the steps, across the pavement, opened the door and checked the mounting chauffeur.

"Wait a minute."

To Moordius, who, cigar between two fingers, regarded him in polite surprise, he said:

"I can't help giving my consent to the marriage—you have me in a cleft stick. But as long as I've anything to

do with it, not a penny of her money is going into Moordius & Co."

Moordius opened a plump hand. "Sleep on it, my dear Timothy. Sleep on it."

Timothy, with his foot on the step, and his head inside the discreetly lit car, and the rain pouring on his back, replied:

"It's no use. I can only do what I feel is right. You can talk till you're black in the face,"—in figurative expression Timothy had no originality—"but I'll never give way."

"Won't you?" smiled Moordius.

"No," said Timothy.

"You'll repent it."

"One only repents of wrong-doing," said Timothy, repeating a phrase of religious upbringing.

"This is neither the time nor the place for casuistry," said Moordius. "Regret may be the better word." He bent forward so that his face nearly touched Timothy's. "My good fellow, I've been hard put to it to keep my temper all the evening in face of your stupidity. But if you'll take a piece of advice, drop on your knees before you go to bed and pray God to prevent you from making yourself one of the most colossal fools in the universe."

"If I pray at all," said Timothy, "I'll pray Him to keep me an honest man."

He slammed the door of the car and went into the house and threw himself in his own old cracked leather chair, and stared before him, breathlessly, incredulously, at the sudden wreckage he had made of his life.

CHAPTER XVII

TIMOTHY slept not a wink the whole night through. All the devils of fearfulness of all the years got together round about his bedside and fluttered over his eyelids their bat-like and terrifying wings. His courage oozed out of every pore of his cold, perspiring body. He arose limp and haggard, and harrowingly found himself the object of concern of the women and children round the breakfast table. It was a relief to get into the open air on his way to the office. It was a keen spring morning of blue mist, when Piccadilly smiles with the demure innocence of a Greuze maiden, and the Strand might be the lambent radiance of a fairy princess. But to Timothy all was as dark as November fog.

The uniformed damsel of the lift wore a bunch of violets at her bosom and made light laughing reference to the day as she whisked him up to his landing.

"Yes. Dreadful weather," said he absently.

The morning passed dully over the routine work presented by the inscrutable Soussouki. Moordius did not appear. Timothy went out to lunch. Returned. There was nothing to do. On other similar occasions he would have limped jauntily out of the place and gone to read at his club, or taken one of the young women and the children for a jaunt. But today he sat still, looking out of his window over the hazy mystery of the river.

Indecision tortured him. After last night, he ought to resign his position. So bade his sensitive conscience. But to do so was ruin. He himself did not count, nor

did Phoebe, who could be sent back to her parents. But Naomi counted enormously. Besides, if the banking ship was sinking, did not loyalty ordain his sticking to it?

How the revelation of the true Moordius had come he could not tell. Yet it had come; and all in a few concentrated minutes. The mask had dropped and he had seen the vulture features and the hard, cruel and greedy eyes. And he had known, as Paul had known the truth of Christ, the truth of Jevons of the Midland Citizens' Bank, of Murgatroyd, his friend of the Money Market, and of the two scandal-mongers at the restaurant. And at the same time he had seen suddenly reflected, as it were, in the evil face, the woman roped in pearls, whom, in his loyalty, he had utterly forgotten.

There was no doubt about it. Moordius & Co. was tottering. No sounder institution existed in England than the Midland Citizens' Bank. The transfer of Suzanne's shares was a master-stroke of bluff in order to bolster up a business brought to ruin by gambling and debauchery. And now, on the eve of his marriage with Suzanne, Moordius had claimed the use of the remainder of her fortune.

He had had the instinctive courage to refuse. He knew, within himself, that he would always refuse. Racks, red-hot pincers, *la peine forte et dure,* all the coaxing methods of the Inquisition, would never gain his consent. As well tempt him to cut Naomi's throat for a million of money. . . . Yet his one act of courage reduced him to a pulp of fear.

His mind worked at once in the dark of his ignorance, and in the white light of his candour, perplexed in either medium, to find a motive for Moordius's proposition. Obviously he wanted money. Once married to Suzanne,

no matter under what French system, he could easily persuade her to give the bank the handling of her fortune. She was too young and frank, too bewildered, in her present state of careless tutelage, by the immensity of it, to question its disposal at the hands of her blindly-trusted guardians. Was the pressure of affairs so immediate that he could not even wait for marriage with Suzanne?

His marriage. Yes. He had him in a cleft stick. He held him bound, fettered, gagged, and dangling on a string over the edge of a precipice. For once Timothy's imagination worked shudderingly, as he realized the craft whereby Moordius had got him in his power. He had been duped as few men had ever allowed themselves to be duped. As an independent man, partner in Combermere, Son & Combermere, he could have taken his stand against Moordius in defence of Suzanne's fortune. As a vague member of Moordius & Co., with all his money and his expectations under the will mortgaged to, and sunk in Moordius & Co., with the real working of the bank carefully concealed from him, he was but a puppet in Moordius's hands. Once more he broke into cold sweat, at the thought of his vanity and his folly. There are times when a man's humility reveals itself as his essential pride. Timothy's pride suffered torture. He knew himself to be a dull and plodding fellow. Moordius, tongue in cheek, had all but persuaded him into a belief in his financial genius. He was but a poor dupe, after all, taken in like any country bumpkin by the glib worker of the confidence trick.

What had happened to the block of shares transferred from the Midland Citizens' Bank to Moordius & Co.? Had they been swallowed up in the welter of the bank's

desperation? He knew nothing. All he knew was that Moordius claimed more, claimed it immediately, for needs obviously pressing. He had counted on his mild subserviency, reckoning that such a man of putty would have neither wit nor will to question. But when he began to question, down came the threat like a hammer. It was alternate bribery and blackmail.

Timothy could not go home to the pretty gaiety of the nursery tea. He felt himself caught up and enfolded in clouds of dishonour. He stood, till the office closed, looking out of the high window at the warm afternoon sunshine and the tender spring sky, against which the grey mass of Lambeth Palace dreamed agedly. He took up hat and stick and descended into the brisk rush of Kingsway and wandered aimlessly into the crowded Strand. After a while he found himself standing in Trafalgar Square, very tired by reason of his limp, at piteous loose-end for occupation. He thought of his club in Piccadilly, where he knew no one. There was a musty room, an annexe to the library, shunned by members, yet possessing an arm-chair in a corner by the shelves on which calf-bound volumes of *The Annual Register* were stacked. He would seek that seclusion. A taxi with red flag flying drew near the kerb. He was about to hail it, when yet another fear smote him. Casual taxi cabs belonged to the unreal world of false standards into which he had been lured. In the sphere of the pre-Moordius Timothy, they had no existence. Tube or omnibus, now, for an honest man. He made his nervous and painful way through the traffic, across to Cockspur Street, where the omnibuses stopped and whirred and swallowed up the hordes of home-goers disgorged from the offices of the Strand and Whitehall. This afternoon the crowd seemed

to be more than usually multitudinous and eager; more than usually agile in leaping between the tired and lame Timothy and the step of his desire. Thus three Piccadilly bound omnibuses filled up and scumbled unconcernedly away. He was on the verge of entering the fourth, when a stout and greasy woman interposed a bulk reeking of stale perfume and with a "Who are you pushing of?" sent him tottering back on to the pavement, where he would have fallen, had not kindly arms received him. He turned with apologies and thanks.

"Why, it's old Timothy."

"Augustus!"

Young Combermere, the Autumn Leaf, shrivelled and dapper in pale brown suit and white spats, wrung him by the hand. Such a providential rescue needed liquid celebration. One of his clubs, The Union, stood hospitably over the way. Timothy yielded. They crossed, Augustus talking airily.

They sat, with the celebrating glasses before them in the comfortable smoking-room. Up to this point Augustus's agreeable rattle had made up their communion. But now——

"And now," said he, "my dear Timothy, tell me all about your funny old self."

Timothy's self feeling far from funny, he could not tell about it. He smiled, with vague wanness, at Augustus.

"Oh, I don't know. Same old thing."

The Autumn Leaf took a refreshing draught.

"I looked out for you the other evening at the big fight. Thought you'd be sure to be there."

"I'm less of a bachelor than I was," said Timothy.

"Good Lord! You're not married?" cried Augustus,

as though such an absurdity was beyond credence. And yet Timothy was a widower.

Timothy explained his domestic situation.

"It strikes me," said the other, with his well-bred and withered laugh, "that you're living the luxurious existence of the *coq en pâte*."

What that meant precisely, Timothy did not know. He flushed.

"I assure you——" he began.

"You dear thing——" remonstrated the Autumn Leaf, waving away all suggestion of the sultanesque. "Why, of course. That fairy tale of a will. It puts you into an amazing position. I quite understand. All I meant was that it has its agreeable side."

Timothy, with the devils of fear encompassing him round about, echoed:

"Yes. It has its agreeable side."

"By the way," his host asked after a while, "how do you get on with your friend, Peter Moordius?"

"Oh, he's all right," Timothy replied britannically.

The withered wisp of the old young man held him for a hesitating second with his bright brown eyes and then, bending forward, laid a lean finger on his knee.

"Is he? I happened to be in Monte Carlo."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Timothy with a start. "You too?"

"Why shouldn't I?" laughed Augustus.

"I mean you and the other man from Monte Carlo—a man I don't know—whom I heard saying things about Moordius."

"I should think," remarked Augustus, "that everything he said was true."

"You'd better tell me all about it," said Timothy. "It

seems beastly disloyal, I know; but I've got to face things —and I'd better know the worst."

The tale told by Augustus confirmed and picturesquely elaborated that of the man whom he had overheard. Nachoula, the dancer, roped in pearls, was again about with him. The scandalous chronicles of Monte Carlo are of many grades of veracity; but there is a section of habitual frequenters who pride themselves, like scientific historians, on their accuracy. One such was old Lady Tellurin, a Monte Carlo figure of thirty years standing, who lived God knows how but generally credited with earning a precarious livelihood, as an infallible social oracle. Never caught out, in all her career, declared Augustus. A sleuth-hound. Mothers went to her as to a fortune-teller, with fees in their pockets, for information concerning men desirous of marrying their daughters. That was the mildest and most innocent of her semi-professional activities.

"What that old woman told me about Moordius would freeze your blood. Of course I talked about your affairs —I was always interested in the silly will—and bless you, she knew all about it. Well, her history of Moordius was devastating. Reminded me of the Roman historian of the private lives of the Emperors—I forget his name—whom Gibbon is always quoting. Begins with an A—but never mind——"

"Why didn't you let me know?" asked Timothy.

"My dear fellow——"

Augustus protested. How could he? Such things were not done. He was not an international tale bearer. Besides, he did not conceive the possibility of Timothy, a man of the world and a financial expert, being ignorant of a notorious state of affairs.

"I'm neither one nor the other," said Timothy; "let me hear what this old woman told you."

In his evasive style, the Autumn Leaf repeated what he could remember of the scandalous chronicle of Peter Moordius. Histories of women, of course. Years ago, Marcelle Florestan, the idol of the Théâtre des—anyhow the something theatre, it didn't matter—had committed suicide—gas in a room with brown paper pasted over the cracks of door and windows. Timothy must remember the sensation all over Europe. Poor old Timothy didn't, not belonging to the world which interests itself in the suicides of naughty little French actresses. Augustus wondered. Why, the whole point of the sensation was that she was found with a mysterious slash, as from a razor, from point of right jaw across the face, sparing the eyes, to the left temple. No. Timothy hadn't heard of it. Well, that didn't matter. Marcelle Florestan died tragically in the flower of her fascination. Motive for suicide, the deflowering of her beauty by the barbarous razor cut. But who had administered it? Moordius. The police, hat in one hand, bribe in the other, accepted his alibi. A mere matter of formality, monsieur. It was some *apache* with whom Mlle. Florestan must have been deceiving the young millionaire banker. But the old sleuth-hound, Lady Tellurin, held proof that it was Moordius.

"I was a bit incredulous. We were sitting in a corner of the bar of the Sporting Club where I had taken the old thing to give her a drink. Moordius came in with his Nichoula; dropped her for a moment and bowed and kissed the hand of Lady Tellurin. She introduced us—me as one of your old partners. He looked swiftly round and saw that his dancer had fallen into a knot of ac-

quaintances and was all right. If she hadn't been, he'd have cut and run after her. It was obvious. If an angel had that fellow's social gifts they'd promote him archangel at once. As it was, he was all over me. A partner of my dear friend Timothy. I must lunch with him, dine with him, spend the rest of my enchanting life with him. That's the sort of impression he gave me. Oh! a fascinating devil. So we chatted. Then: 'How's fortune?' he asked the dear old thing. She said: 'Awful.' Something struck me, you know what I mean, to look from one to the other quickly—and I saw just a little play of eyes—all in a fraction of a second—and—I don't know—it was just like two fiends hating each other. Never seen anything so extraordinary in my life. She said: 'Awful, I was going to get ten *mille* from the barman.' Then they were all smiles. He said: 'But, dear lady, why pay fantastic interest when I'm ready to be your entirely non-usurious banker?' Those were his words. I remember them because I like curious phrases. 'Non-usurious banker.' You see? Well, he handed her a bundle of ten-*mille* notes as if it had been a bouquet of flowers and kissed her hand again and wrung mine, as if acquaintance with me had been the yearning desire of his life, and went and joined the dancer. And do you know what the old thing said—and I swear there was the damnedest, black-mailest twinkle in her eye? 'He's an unconscionable villain, but he's the most generous fellow in the world.' I grinned. If ever there was a barefaced blackmail that was it. Let's have another drink."

He called the waiter. Timothy, glad to postpone the evil hour of return to the sweet and trustful innocencies of Montpellier Square, consented to absorb another mild potation. He also accepted a cigar from Combermere,

who, finding an intensely interested audience in Timothy, proceeded with his tale of Peter Moordius.

"What that old woman told me," he repeated, "was amazing. She has a theory about Moordius. He loves cruelty for cruelty's sake. She had a tale about a cat. . . . I forget the details, thank heaven. Pretty loathsome. Lord! She's the limit. When the Recording Angel in the downstairs Chancery's sick of his job, they'll give it to Lady Tellurin. No tears from her hawk eyes to blot out entries! Well, here's luck again."

"Odd you should have mentioned a cat," said Timothy musingly.

For his mind went back to the second preceding his first meeting with Moordius, when the cat had scuttered with a squeal out of the door and Moordius had received him with an apology.

"All this scandal apart," said the Autumn Leaf, "are things of Moordius & Co. really all right?"

"Perfectly," answered Timothy, who had to be loyal.

Augustus proclaimed himself delighted. Of course Timothy must have his reassuring inside knowledge. But Moordius had been spending vast sums for years—not only on gaming-tables and horses and dancers, but latterly on the London Stock Exchange and the Bourse. There were ugly rumours about. Naturally, all of them lies.

"All of them lies," said Timothy.

It was getting late. Again the problem of home-going confronted Timothy. He asked permission to telephone and give a message to Dorothy. Regretted he was detained and would not be home till late at night. He took leave of Augustus and finding room in a Piccadilly-bound bus, went to his vast and lonely club, where he dined and

spent perhaps the most miserable evening, as yet, of his life. From Augustus he had received confirmation of all his doubts, his anxieties and his fears. Moordius & Co. was on the rocks. Moordius himself was desperate. To him Suzanne's remaining fortune was the straw to which, according to the figure of speech, clutches the drowning man. But that straw he should not have. Meanwhile starvation for Naomi and Timothy. The roast mutton stuck in his throat. The pages of a smoking-room novel swam before his eyes.

He reached Montpellier Square at half-past eleven. At the sight of chinks of illumination through drawing-room windows, his heart sank. He had hoped that every one would be abed and asleep. He let himself in quietly with his latch-key and stole down the passage to his library, where a bright fire lately tended declared the welcome of his household. The irony of the luxurious comfort smote the man faced in the near future by inevitable bankruptcy. He had no right to this fraudulent expenditure of fuel. . . . Well, a last pipe to compose him to an uneasy bed.

He had stuffed and lighted it when the door opened and Suzanne came in, her mouth and eyes hard, her chin in the air; a new Suzanne, unknown to Timothy; the Suzanne who, in her young insolence, had told old Joe Grabbiter to go to the devil.

"I've come to talk to you. I've waited for you, for there are things we must straighten out before we go to bed."

She sat in an arm-chair by the fire and glanced up at him defiantly. Timothy hung vaguely about, pipe in hand, his body wrung with a pain almost physical. She came as an enemy, indignant, implacable. She, Suzanne,

for whom as he thought, in the ready-made phrase of the unimaginative man, he would sell his soul alive. Yet it was a newer prescience that foretold to his apprehensive mind the words that she had come to speak; so that when she spoke them, he seemed to have heard them all before.

She had spent most of the day with Moordius, who had informed her of Timothy's amazing attitude. What did it mean?

"As long as I'm your guardian, I must look after your interests to the best of my ability," said he.

"You insinuate that Peter Moordius isn't looking after my interests."

Timothy looked at her, with a drawn face.

"You make things very difficult for me."

"How?" she challenged.

Which way lay honour? Which way duty? It was so easy and so mean to discredit a successful rival. The engagement broken off, through his agency, what man of the world would not impute to him the base motives of saving the enormous fees which he would forfeit by her marriage? Surely Suzanne could not so impute them. Yet why not? What reason had she, after all, for regarding him otherwise than as a dull anxious fellow fully alive to the value and the temptation of money?

"I'd rather you didn't ask," he said, lamely. "I can't prevent your marriage. After that, you're your own mistress. Why not wait?"

"Because I don't choose to," she flashed. "I've implicit trust in the man I'm going to marry. If I hadn't, I wouldn't marry him."

Said Timothy rather miserably: "Haven't you got some kind of the same trust in me?"

"In matters of this kind, I haven't—I'm sorry," she added, seeing him wince. "I don't want to be unkind. But you can't pretend to have Moordius's knowledge of finance. He's a great man, and like all great men he has bitter enemies. You've been listening to them and your mind is poisoned against him. I shouldn't have thought you capable of it."

"I've come across no enemies of Moordius," said Timothy.

"You've been taking in idle gossip, which is worse," she retorted.

They argued a while on these lines, Timothy wretchedly on the defensive. At last she said, in anger:

"You'd give anything for me not to marry Moordius."

"You know I would," said poor Timothy, his heart in his eyes.

She made an impatient gesture. "All that is silliness. Anyhow, at least you're not the man to refuse on that account. There's something behind. What is it? I want to know. Any one been telling you lies about a Madame Nachoula?"

Timothy started. Even his unsubtle brain could see how craftily Moordius had spent his day.

"What do you know about her?" he asked.

"Everything. The truth. Moordius has been quite frank. Men aren't angels, thank God. Years ago he had a liaison with this lady, and years ago it ended. This winter he meets her in Monte Carlo, in the fulness of her fame and her wealth. She commands enormous fees. If he had cut her, pretended not to know her—considering what had been between them—he would have been a cad. Such things aren't done. They are there together in the Casino, in the Sporting Club. They talk.

Once she says: 'Take me to lunch at the Réserve Beaulieu, so that we can talk, in quiet, of our lives since the far-off days.' They go. I see no harm. He talks to her of me. She takes out an enamel and diamond brooch from her corsage, 'A test of the great nature of your fiancée of which you boast so much. Present that to her from the heart of one who loved you too when she was young.' Well. Here it is."

She sat up straight and touched her bosom. And then Timothy noticed the brooch which she was wearing. He shrank back instinctively, shocked to the depths.

"Oh! How could you?"

She flung out her arms. "Oh, you little-minded English people! What could I do more to show that I was great enough to accept the test of my loyalty and his?"

Timothy's empty pipe dropped from his fingers. He limped about the room in his agitated way, trod on the pipe, an old and cherished friend, smashing it irremediably, and was conscious of disaster. His Puritan soul shivered, as it had done the night before as from the beating of evil wings, manifesting the presence of evil. He looked askance at the dancer's gift. Two snakes' heads, with glistening diamond tongues; horrible to see on Suzanne's pure bosom. He caught her eyes always fixed on him, angrily ironical, as he moved. He could not bear to look at her. But look at her, every few seconds he must, in order to spy, shrinkingly, what taint of evil had touched that young face so proud and clear. Yet nothing of it could be discerned. His simple mind, at first, could only deal with things in their lowest terms; he envisaged just the unimaginable facts. A girl had accepted a betrothal gift from the cast-off mistress of the man she was about to marry. In the abstract, the idea

was revolting. It upset all sense of moral values. He came to the concrete. It was Suzanne, his Suzanne, Britomart, the fearless, the chaste, the proudest of women who had done this.

"For God's sake, take it off," said he at last, fronting her.

"I'll do no such thing; I have the courage of my convictions."

He sat in the old chair on the opposite side of the hearth and stared into the fire; and through the murk of his thoughts there arose a dawn of Truth. Suzanne had lit a cigarette and lay cross-legged in her chair, looking at the silent figure of Timothy, with a queer little curl of her lips. But this Timothy did not see. He was intent on the dawn of the revelation. Moordius had lied. The sudden sensitiveness of his being recorded, as on a photographic plate, the lying of Moordius. Moordius, aware of scandal, had invented the romantic story. Moordius himself had bought the brooch, which, with a twist of the malevolent in his nature, he had selected in the form of the serpents' heads. This he had prevailed upon Suzanne to accept. This symbol. This symbol of evil.

"Well, my mid-Victorian friend, what are you thinking about?"

He put out a weary hand and limped over to the old couch by the wall.

"If you don't understand, what does it matter?"

Presently she said:

"Now we've cleared up one slander, let us get to others. Moordius has lost his whole fortune at the gaming-tables, I suppose?"

"That's more or less the story," groaned Timothy.

"It's too idiotic for words. Those are the ideas of my good aunt at Dreuil or the churchwarden at Balham; not of a man acquainted with the relative value of money. I have seen Moordius's private gambling notebook. Do you know what his losses are for the last twelve months? Ten thousand francs—two hundred pounds. Now that's wiped off. What else is there?" As Timothy, hunched up, the picture of tongue-tied woe, made no reply, she went on: "Moordius & Co. is going broke?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Timothy.

She broke into a scornful laugh. "Because Moordius & Co. see their way of realizing an immense fortune with the money I could put in——?"

"A flourishing bank ought to be able to realize it out of their present funds."

"Moordius said you were hopeless. I wouldn't believe him. Now I do."

Said Timothy at bay, raising an agonized face, and looking at her across the room: "I should advise you, at the present moment, to believe as little as possible of what Moordius tells you."

She rose flushed and flashing.

"How dare you? My God, how dare you?"

The Latin in her unlocked a torrent of wrath under which he sat overwhelmed. She hurled at him all the taunts of unreflecting anger. His pettiness, his stupidity, his incapacity, his ingratitude, his common mind that let itself be poisoned by any viperous tongue. Spreading himself the poison abroad. A timid hare weakening his own credit. Oh! He was impossible. With a far-flung gesture she dismissed him from sentient existence.

Timothy's memory went back to the only period of his life when he had stood up to, or rather cowered under,

an angry woman; a very short, very unhappy period, which he thought he had forgotten. The same feminine unreason and injustice. But then love had gone, if it had ever been. Now love was. Love deep and purified of hope. Love adoring, yet very pitiful. The pain of the past was as nothing to the present torture.

Finally she crossed the little room and stood over him.

"Why are you sitting there like a block of wood? For God's sake say something."

"I've said all I can," Timothy replied. "There's nothing more."

"There's everything more," she cried. "There's the whole original question. Are you or are you not going to give your consent to this transference?"

"No," said Timothy, meeting her eyes. "I'd die first."

"Then," retorted Suzanne, very white about the nostrils, "you declare yourself Moordius's enemy. In that case I can't live here any longer beneath your roof. I go to a hotel tomorrow. Oh, yes, I'm aware of the terms of the imbecile will"—she laughed defiantly—"I'm quite willing to forfeit the pound a day gratuity. I'm perfectly free. I go to a hotel tomorrow—to stay according to my good pleasure. I leave it to marry Moordius. I hope you understand. Good night."

She moved, indignant goddess to the door. He sprang up and, with piteous, scrambling gait, ran to anticipate her. He succeeded, and flinging his back against the door faced her imploringly.

"Suzanne!"

She said: "Don't make a scene. Let me go to bed."

He moved aside and she passed haughtily through the door without a word.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next morning the children clamoured for a Suzanne absent from the breakfast table. Word came down that she had a headache and was breakfasting in her own room. Naomi wished she could have a headache, breakfast in bed being, to her young idea, the beginning of a perfect day. Eggs, she declared, tasted so much better. The more practical-minded Phoebe raised the objection that unless you were very, very careful, they made a nasty mess on the sheets. To which Naomi countered by arguing that when you were really ill, nobody was cross with you, and that eggs made nice yellow maps, much more exciting than those in geography, and you could stick in all kinds of towns with little grits of toast.

Valerie dispensing tea and coffee at the end of the table and, cheek by jowl with Naomi, threw her arm round the feeding child.

"You little horror. What will you be thinking of doing next?"

"I think of lots of things," said Naomi, relinquishing spoon for coffee cup. "And if I was grown up I'd do 'em."

"Tell me one," urged Valerie, and, in her unheedful coaxing, she shook the child so that the coffee spurted from the cup over the white table cloth.

"Oh, I'm so sorry——"

But Naomi clapped her hands and crowed and apostrophized Timothy.

"Hooray, hooray, hooray! It was all Aunt Valerie's fault. She spilt it. And look, Daddy, there's a perfectly gorgeous map of Kingdom Come——"

"My dear Naomi——" Timothy began in protest.

"Oh, I don't spell it as you do. My country is spelt K-i-n-d-o-m-c-u-m. Kindomcum, you see? And it's full of rabbits and white mice and rivers and giants——"

"And chocolates," said Phoebe.

"Of course, silly. Only you've got to go a long, long way for 'em." With a porridge encrusted spoon she pointed to the tip of a promontory of coffee stain. "That's where the chocolate mines are, guarded by a fearful dragon."

Sergeant Dorothy, in attendance, swooped round the table and snatched the unpleasant spoon from the dimpled, far-reaching hand.

"Miss Naomi—manners. Please!"

Naomi, docile, took the rebuke philosophically and went on with her porridge. After a few mouthfuls, she turned round her brown cropped head to Dorothy, and at the same time pointed with her spoon.

"I could tell you where to find di'monds. But I won't."

"No, darling," laughed Valerie, "but you'll tell me afterwards, as a great secret, won't you?"

Naomi nodded mysteriously and there was a twinkle in her brown eyes.

"P'r'aps," she said.

Timothy, to whom such disputations usually gave unending delight, bolted such food as he could swallow, distracted and unheeding. Suzanne might have a headache, but his own was splitting with pain, after a second night of sleeplessness.

"You look as if you ought to have stayed in bed, too," said Valerie with anxious concern.

"Why?" he asked. "There's nothing the matter with me."

He rose abruptly, gave the children perfunctory kisses and rushed off earlier than usual to the office. There he spent a day that was the replica of the one preceding; save that he was anxious to return to his home, and, finding Suzanne restored to health, persuade her to reconsider her revolutionary decision.

When he reached Montpellier Square, she had gone, bag and baggage, without a word of farewell. She had left as address an exclusive little hotel in Mayfair. His entrance was greeted by a household in consternation. What did it all mean? asked Valerie. But he could not tell her before the children, who alternately described and demanded explanation of Mademoiselle's departure. It had been emotional. She had hugged them. She had wept. She had implored them never to forget her. She had said she must go because she was going to be married soon. But why couldn't she stay there until she was married? They knew she was going to be married because she had told them she would arrange with Aunt Valerie to take them to Paris, so that they could be bridesmaids at the wedding. Weren't they going to be bridesmaids?

"I don't know, my dears, I really don't know," said he, gathering them in his arms as they clambered eagerly about his knees.

"And Mademoiselle said to Aunt Valerie, 'It's up to you to comfort the poor old thing.' "

"That was you, Uncle Timothy," cried Phoebe, ever following Naomi's lead.

Valerie flushed. "It had nothing at all to do with Uncle Timothy."

The unwonted asperity in her tone reduced the infants to scared silence. Timothy drew them close to him to hide embarrassment. At the same time, he recognized a pitiful grain of consolation. She had thought of him kindly, after all, and, unsuspecting had conveyed a message. Though offended, she had gone off, a melting goddess.

"Yes, Mademoiselle meant something quite different," he said gently. "Something you can't understand. When she comes back, perhaps she'll tell you."

"Oh, she *is* coming back?" cried Naomi, quickly. "When?"

"I don't think she knows herself."

"Oh, well, long as she hasn't gone for ever and ever and ever——"

"Ever and ever, amen," interposed Phoebe.

"—it doesn't matter so much."

"Of course not," said Timothy. "Let us all be cheerful."

Dorothy, entering with the tea-things, gave great aid to the following of his admonition. A cake with pink icing and crystallized violets on the outside and mouth-watering succulence inside, purchased for consolatory purposes by Valerie, completed the good work.

After a while the two elders slipped from the room. On the landing Valerie halted.

"The meaning of it? She gave me no clue. Said I could guess. I suppose I do in a way. My father, of course. It's the forbidden subject between us—a condition of our friendship that I hold my tongue. And I

love Suzanne. I haven't too many people in the world to love. You've had a quarrel?"

"No—and yes," he answered, with deep corrugation of his brows. "Your father and I are joint trustees of Suzanne's fortune. We don't see eye to eye as to the handling of it."

"I warned you," said Valerie.

"You did," he acquiesced. "Still, Suzanne's in love with your father and naturally sides with him. The position was impossible, wasn't it? She has taken the only course open to her."

Valerie slowly descended the stairs, followed by Timothy. Half-way she turned.

"What a loyal soul you are."

"I don't know what I am," said Timothy.

They reached the landing of the first floor. On the left lay the room of russet and green and vermilion. On the right, the drawing-room. Valerie, her hand on the knob, opened the door of the latter a few inches. She glanced up at him, piteousness in her dark eyes.

"Then *enfants terribles* were right. Suzanne did say that to me."

It was a confession indubitable, all but desperate. Through lack of subtlety it conveyed itself clear even to Timothy's simple mind. And there were the eyes of the woman with their appeal. She pushed the door open, invitingly, a little wider. She stood, unconsciously proclaiming the sensuous charm of her slim, yielding figure revealed by the close-fitting wisp of lilac chiffon that was her dress, her pale face, not unbeautiful, irradiated by a strange light which he had not seen on that of woman before, all his life long. Sex instinct both com-

pelled and withheld him. Abysmally ignorant of feminine guile, he knew, however, that if he followed her into that room, there would be the devil of some sort to pay. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have paid. All that was allurement and all that was promise tempted the man in Timothy. And it was the allurement and promise, not of the siren, but of the woman he knew to be exquisitely pure. Temptation a thousand damnable times more potent. All the comfort that woman could give to heart-stricken man was his for the taking.

Heart beats struck the vibrating seconds as they stood facing each other. Then suddenly, to Timothy, came the figure of Moordius, bland and smiling between them. Poor dear, her mind was unhinged. The tragic death of her husband. The change will do her good. . . . Timothy came back to his sober senses. A shiver passed through him at the thought that he might have yielded, on a low plane, to the instances of an unbalanced woman —he for whom no woman existed outside the far-off wonder of Suzanne. Still holding him with her dark eyes, she threw the door wide open.

"Won't you come in and talk?"

Timothy, inspired, pulled out pipe and tobacco pouch.

"No, my dear," said he, gently, "I think I had better go and smoke over the situation by myself."

She moved her head from side to side wretchedly. She was a broken woman without much pride. Her eyes brimmed over with tears.

"Anyhow, let me stay and tide things over and look after the children."

"Why, of course, of course," said Timothy unreflecting.

They parted, and Timothy went downstairs.

The days passed, devoid of incident. In deference to

Valerie's urgent imploring, he postponed, from day to day, the summoning of Angela Messiter to take charge of the nursery. The position was untenable for long; that he realized. But how to cross an almost weeping woman in her heart's desire? He thanked heaven for Suzanne-trained Dorothy, who assumed autocratic authority in matters of discipline and hygiene. Valerie, enthusiastic amateur, kept fantastic school, whereat the children enjoyed themselves prodigiously. Half the farmyard ranged round the table, each individual, including the policeman, being provided with a book, shared in the lessons and responded to the teacher's question, the grotesque answers to which were given by Naomi in a voice supposed to be characteristic of the examinee. The infliction of suitable punishment on the dunces took up a great part of the time. Of course, Valerie reported the children to be as good as gold. Had they not been, they would have been most ill-conditioned urchins. They adored Valerie. Valerie, adoring them, turned her self-appointed duties into an orgy of excited happiness. Thus, Timothy decided to let well alone.

He sought Suzanne, who received him with somewhat stately good-humour. She had made up her mind, once and for all, and nothing could induce her to reconsider her decision. Money? Moordius, as usual, advanced her as much as she needed. She had made friends and was having a good time. Moordius was in Paris, greatly occupied with affairs. For slander she had no ears. If the reports of his financial position were true, all the more reason for her loyalty to the man she loved. She loved him because he was not of the little people. He was of the race of conquerors; as many faceted as a cut diamond. A being of infinite strength, delicacy and

tenderness. She knew. She had her own good reasons for knowing.

"But supposing it's all true and Moordius & Co., fail tomorrow," asked Timothy.

"If it's legally possible, I'll marry him the day after," she declared. "But if it fails through your pig-headedness, I'll never forgive you, Timothy, my dear."

So Timothy went away sorrowing, but unmoved in his irrevocable determination.

The days in his office passed in mild routine. Fearful of expense, he once more limped into the George and Vulture and lunched off the succulent chop in that temple of feverish deglutition. And once more he drank his coffee in the underground establishment, and watched the game of dominoes played by his old unknown friends. Besides, for the past month, hearty fellows had ceased to ask him to lunch at the Savoy, and he himself found no opportunity to offer to others the hospitality of Moordius & Co. This stagnation in the social life of business confirmed his apprehensions and added to his anxiety. From Moordius he had received no direct communication since the evening of the Carlton dinner party. The air was dull and heavy with menace.

At last the storm seemed to break, and then began a series of events whose sequence Timothy, in after years, had some difficulty in determining.

First, he received a letter from Suzanne.

"Dear Timothy,

"I'm sick of London and I'm going away by myself for a while. Letters addressed % Moordius & Co. will reach me. But I'm not going to tell any one where I am. No, I'm not going into retreat at Dreuil.

"I'm not ungrateful for all your love and devotion; it breaks my heart to leave you and Naomi and Phoebe like this, but it also breaks

my heart to realize that, heaven knows why, you are on the side of Moordius's enemies. He, too, with the sincere affection he has for you, feels it deeply. Oh, do believe me, Timothy. I make a last appeal to your common sense. . . ."

And so on and so forth, with the reiteration of old argument in the language of infatuated woman. Timothy, groaning in despair, sat down with the full intention of writing his heart out. The poor fellow, after three agonized night hours in his library, succeeded in inditing a dryasdust letter setting forth the reasons for his recalcitrance. He went to bed very weary. The conduct, through speech, of human affairs, from negotiations between statesmen to discussions between fish-wives is characterized by damnable reiteration. The world overarticulate is used to it, expects it. It is the principle of all advertising. But now and then, there comes into a wordy struggle, the inarticulate man. What he has managed to say, he has said once and for all. To go round and round the point and say the same thing over and over again overwhelms him with a sense of intolerable tyranny. It is as though a man having, in untoward circumstances, jumped a hedge, he should be compelled by an invisible whip to jump it backwards and forwards indefinitely, till he dropped. Timothy envied the cat who had lately taken to curling herself up for the night at the foot of his bed. Cats could act without, even for once, deigning to explain their motives.

An afternoon or two later he found Valerie depressed and all but reduced to her old Paris listlessness. Moordius had paid her a flying visit. Her father at his worst. It was not possible for her to tell what had passed between them; with the exception of this, however—he had said that her living under the same roof as Timothy,

now that Suzanne had gone, offended the proprieties.

"In one way, I suppose it does," said Timothy, perplexed, but honest.

When she came down to their dull dinner, he could not but notice that she wore a morning dress, with sleeves; for it was her habit to appear of evenings—the more to charm him, though of that he had not the faintest idea in the world—with bare neck and arms. After the fish, which she scarcely touched, while lifting a glass of water to her lips, her hand dropped and the water flooded the tablecloth. She burst into a sudden passion of tears and fled from the room.

Timothy's impulse was to follow her, but even Timothy could not live in so feminine an environment as the house in Montpellier Square without learning to respect certain incomprehensibilities of an incomprehensible sex. So he sat still and went on with a peculiarly Dead-Sea-apple meal. Presently Dorothy gave the message that Mrs. Doon, not feeling very well, had gone to bed.

Again more puzzlement for Timothy. Moordius was obviously the *fons et origo* of the flooded tablecloth. A suspicion began to enter his mind, now prejudiced, that Moordius might not treat Valerie in private with the same patient indulgence as he paraded in public, and that the determining causes of her hatred might have nothing to do with a brain distraught with grief. Could they lie deep down in the astounding fact of her fatherhood, whose secret he alone of mortals possessed? In the instinctive antagonism of alien blood? He worried over the question, till he could think no more.

His thoughts turned to another phase of Moordius's visit to London—his non-appearance at the office. Then

he remembered that Soussouki, that morning, after going through with him the routine of correspondence, had claimed permission to absent himself till after lunch. It was ridiculous to suppose that Moordius should travel from Paris to London merely to make himself unpleasant to Valerie. He had come to discuss business affairs with Soussouki, of which he intended Timothy to remain ignorant. Again Timothy shivered, as though meshed in an invisible web of evil.

The next morning Valerie came down to breakfast pale and ill; but she had recovered balance. She joined in the children's prattle. But as he was about to leave for the office, she drew him into the deserted dining-room and said:

"My father gives me only a few more days here. You know he is all-powerful. You must write for the children's governess to come at once, so that I can hand over the reins of government."

Timothy nodded gravely. He would stop at the first post office.

"You know, Timothy, I'd ask nothing more in life than to be able to stay here and—and mother them."

Her voice quivered on the intense word, and in her eyes shone a piteous appeal. Timothy took her hand and squeezed it.

"Of course, my dear, I know. Those little wretches would get round anybody's heart—and a heart like yours —well—you know what I mean"—he stumbled on—"I can't tell you what I feel about it. It's all too wretched for words. But I thank you with all that's inside me —indeed I do. And I wish to goodness the present arrangement could go on indefinitely. The kiddies will hate the change."

"Won't you, Timothy?"

"I'll loathe it. In fact," he cried, strung up to unwonted rhetoric, "in fact, I've come to the conclusion that everything is for the worst in this worst of abominable worlds."

He limped out furious with a cosmos of which Moordius loomed as the sinister deity, and summoned Miss Angela Messiter to return to her duties at once.

As the tinily plump and dark-peached complexioned and exceedingly capable lady was eating the blessed bread of idleness at Croydon, and as she was, moreover, a conscientious young woman, Timothy on his return home found her demurely in charge of the nursery tea-table. The children, as yet ignorant of Valerie's impending departure, gave her polite welcome. Valerie had been instinctively wise. Children resent the *fait accompli.* It is too sudden for their immature minds. But they will accept the half-accomplished fact without suspicion, and the half remaining to be accomplished without keen realization. Timothy coming upon this happy family, drew a breath of relief.

Listening to Naomi's confidences, that evening while she sat up in bed, lustily devouring her supper, surrounded by the elect of her plush-skinned family, he gathered that the change of governess-guardians, far from disconcerting her, was a subject for arrogant pride. Most little girls had only one governess. She had three —Mademoiselle, Aunt Valerie and Miss Messiter. Apparently she could conjure up at will whomsoever of the trio she desired.

"We're going to have serious lessons now," she remarked, shaking her bobbed brown head at him and

looking at him out of her wise brown eyes. "Miss Messiter says it's going to be good for us."

"Do you like everything that is good for you, Naomi?" he asked.

"H'm," said Naomi, with her mouth full, "do you?"

CHAPTER XIX

IT was blue sky and blue water, with just a dash of wind to whip up the blood in the cheeks; to most of the cross-Channel passengers, the enchanted beginning of holiday delights. Content shone on faces around, and the crispness of laughter here and there broke the murmuring quietude. But in the midst of the pleasantness on the upper deck, Valerie lay brooding in the chair wherein Timothy had established her. Moordius, as chief, had summoned him imperatively to Paris on bank business and requested him to escort Valerie back to her home. A very polite summons, suave and ironical. He could leave the London agency without fear in the capable hands of Soussouki. And Valerie—well, she had trespassed already too far on his generous hospitality. Thus, said Valerie, with a curl of the lip, he was killing two birds with one stone. Was their journey for the good of either of them? Timothy sat by her side, sombre too, envying the sure step of the brisk folk who paced up and down the slightly rolling deck. On unsteady ground he felt his lameness more than ever. In the general cheeriness and breeziness and sunshine and echoes of light talk, they looked like two funeral guests astray in an alien wedding party.

Presently, Timothy, tired of his own apprehension, took to looking furtively at her face in profile. Her eyes were set mournfully on the vague horizon where sea and sky melted in a band of mist. He realized now that she had suffered yet another sea-change. In his twilight

way he began to recall, to speculate and to wonder. There were three distinct Valeries he had seen. This was the third. First the languid, supercilious woman of the bitter tongue; then the creature of sweet animation who had brought joy into his house; and now, an enigma, no longer languid, yet no longer joyous, but hard and somewhat tragic.

After a while, subconscious of his scrutiny, she turned and met his glance.

"I wonder what you're thinking of me."

"I don't think you're very happy," he answered.

She laughed with a touch of bitterness. "It's only you, Timothy, who could say a thing like that. Souls aren't happy when they've been taken out of purgatory and are being sent back. Or to put it another way. If a prisoner is released on condition that he accomplishes a mission within a certain time, and if he fails and has to return, he can't take a cheerful view of things. I've failed, and I've got to go back again to my chains and bread and water."

"What was your mission?" he asked.

"To marry you, my dear, by hook or crook. You can't say I haven't done my best. Your head has been full of another woman so you've paid no attention to the decoy. I'm afraid I've been clumsy. I don't know the tricks of the trade; for this is the first time I've been ordered to try them."

Timothy stared incredulously.

"Do you mean that your father sent you over for that purpose.

"For no other. When he came to see me a week ago, it was to learn the reason of my failure. He has this foolish project so much at heart that he got excited and

hurt my arm. Perhaps he doesn't know the strength of his soft hands——"

"Good God!" cried Timothy, bending round in his chair. "That evening——" He remembered her pallor, the sleeved dress, the glass of water in the nerveless hand. . . . "But you were suffering pain——?"

"Oh, yes. Women are used to it," she said in even tones. "I'm a dreadful coward and ought to have stood it better. Really it was nothing. What mattered was the threat of punishment if I failed."

"Punishment? How can your father punish you?"

"I haven't a penny in the world. He can cast me off."

"He doesn't dare. Suzanne wouldn't let him."

Again he was beset by doubts of her sanity. Moordius might be unscrupulous, but he was not fantastic. According to her statement, she had been play-acting all the time. And to what end? To marry him, Timothy, in the eyes of Moordius a man of straw, a puppet, a poor wretch on the brink of bankruptcy. Incredible. Preposterous too, the suggestion of Moordius sending her out into the world to starve.

"There's the Château of Frélon," she said, "in the mountains above Grasse. He bought it for a song about twenty years ago. A rich man's toy. A mediaeval fortress cut off from the rest of God's world. I had a year of it once when I thought I'd rebel. I had to give in. That's where I'm going to spend the rest of my natural life."

Timothy, more and more unable to grasp the increasingly fantastic, cried again:

"Suzanne would never allow it."

"Suzanne, I very strongly suspect, is there now, with servants and automobiles, and all the luxuries of life.

In an hour or so she can drop down into Cannes, Nice, Monte Carlo, have the freedom of the Côte d'Azur. I shall be a prisoner, no servants, not the meanest little car, no luxuries of life. I shall write heart-rending appeals. Suzanne will not believe me. My father will see to that. There's one little word of three letters which he uses as a kind of spell where I am concerned. M-a-d, mad. He has cast this spell over Suzanne. She believes I'm mad. Otherwise, why should I loathe my kind and indulgent father? Indeed, the whole of the story I'm telling you seems rather mad, doesn't it?"

It did. In spite of the side-lights he had received on Moordius's character it did seem mad. He covered his face in his hands. Let him size the whole thing up, reduce it to its lowest terms, to the bare facts. Moordius send his daughter to his, Timothy's house, with the deliberate mission to marry him under penalty of life-long imprisonment in a mouldering fortress. This was post-war twentieth century. It was too absurd for credence.

Not being capable of concentrated meditation, his thoughts lost themselves in a vagueness of mind. He became conscious of the fresh sea breeze playing about his temples; of a man's voice, a few yards away, striking sharply on his ears.

"Yes, old thing. On a day like this, it's jolly to be alive."

He raised his head and looked round. A young man stood, hands on hips, rejoicing in his youth and his possession; for he looked down into an upturned, sea-shell, blue-eyed face, over which played a new world's happiness. Leaning back luxuriantly in her chair, she said:

"I think it's jolly any day."

He laughed the laugh of the light-hearted.

"You bet. But today it's more ripping than ever."

Here was sanity, hope, modernity; a contrast to Valerie's mediaeval despair. Their simple faith in the divine ordering of the universe restored his confidence.

"I don't think things will be as bad as all that," said he.

Valerie shrugged her shoulders and looked out across the sea; and Timothy again glancing at her saw that her lips were set tight and that some dark passion burned in her eyes.

Presently sailors came and swung back the boats and lifted the section of the taffrail for the gangway and the whole assemblage was a-flutter with the preparations for landing. The steamer glided against the Calais pier. The horde of blue-vested, brass-armleted porters swarmed over the decks. The sea journey was over. In the crowded train, they sat in opposite corners and scarcely spoke. Her hardened face reproached and half-frightened him. He had been of little use for help or consolation. Yet what could he do? What could he say?

At the Gare du Nord, Moordius's man, Joseph, met them, took charge of their luggage tickets and escorted them to the car. Timothy's things were to be sent to the Hotel Continental. On this occasion he could not accept the hospitality which Moordius, with urbane irony, had offered.

The car entered the endless rue Lafayette. It was a warm, close evening and the odours of a hot day rose from the asphalt.

"I wish to heaven you were staying with us," she said.

"I wish so too, for your sake," said he, "but how can I? How can I eat the bread of a man I distrust?"

"I am frightened," said Valerie. And, after a short pause: "I wish you could have seen your way to marry me, Timothy."

"My dear," he replied, driven to bay, "how can I think of marriage? Any day I may be a hopeless bankrupt with all my life to remake."

She stared at him for a while. "Why haven't you told me before? Now I see. My father has you in his power and is putting on the screw. Our marriage would have been another turn. Suzanne's fortune, which he wants to eat as he has eaten so many others. But bankrupt? Why should you be? Unless—Moordius & Co."—she caught the tidings in his face. "At last! I've felt it coming; I don't know why. And now he wants Suzanne to save him."

"I'm not certain; but I think that's what it comes to."

"If it was only he that was going to be dragged down, I should go mad with joy. But you—why should you?"

"Because I've been a fool," said Timothy. He smiled, forgetful of her possible position in the impending catastrophe. "It's only Suzanne that matters," said he.

They reached the Place de l'Opéra, alive with its bewildering criss-cross of traffic, passed by the crowded terrace of the Café de la Paix and entered the leafy Boulevard. She wrung her hands.

"Oh, why haven't we had all this out before? We shall be there in a minute or two. Listen, you're right. Only Suzanne matters. We must save her. She is infatuated with him. If he falls, he's a fallen Napoleon.

I know her. He cares nothing for her. If he married her, so long as he got her money he'd let her starve in a ditch. I've been a coward. Before this visit to London my life had made me cynical. I didn't much care what happened to anybody. It was the little fool's affair. In London, with you I came into a world of beautiful things. I was so happy. I wanted to speak to her and tell her all I knew—but I didn't dare. I've been a beaten dog all my life. Yet I made up my mind to tell her here, before her marriage. And now he has whisked her off away from you and me. It's for you to act. She mustn't marry him. He mustn't have her money. But better he should have her money than she should marry him."

Timothy, swept away on the high tide of her emotion, gripped her arm.

"Do you suppose I'd let her marry him of my own free will?"

"My poor Timothy," she said with a wintry smile.

The car flashed by the Madeleine, down the rue Royale, and soon stopped at its destination.

"At least come up and hand over your responsibilities."

He mounted with her in the lift. A maid opened the door. Moordius met them in the dim vestibule, where the pale statuary gleamed mysterious.

"Ah, my dear people. Welcome."

The suavity of his voice rang false in Timothy's ears. Valerie eluded his attempted embrace.

"Why pretend? Timothy knows everything."

"I congratulate him," said Moordius, opening the drawing-room door.

"I shall go and rest," said Valerie; "I'm tired."

"We meet at dinner."

"I'll have something in my room."

"Your wish is law, my dear Valerie," said Moordius.

She held out her hand to Timothy, and pressed his in a tight, nervous clasp.

"Au revoir."

Moordius lifted indulgent shoulders.

"If Valerie won't join us here, we may as well go into my library."

He led the way into the exquisite room, dreaming in the soft May twilight.

"'Everything,' my dear Timothy?" he asked, as he shut the door behind them. "What did she mean?"

"I don't think I can discuss it," said Timothy.

"Yet I'm quite in the dark. Her words must have some meaning for you, though they have none for me."

"Whatever she said was in confidence," Timothy declared.

"As you will," said Moordius. "Nobody can appreciate more than I the delicacy of your sentiments. But as I have often told you before, the poor child has, unfortunately, hallucinations regarding me—and I thought I could claim a father's privilege in asking you for an explanation."

Timothy's ear, grown sensitive, again detected the false note in the music of his speech. Instant conviction came that Valerie's story was true. An unfamiliar thrill, that of anger, passed through him.

"Valerie's no more mad than you are."

"I'm glad you think so, my dear fellow," said Moordius drily. Then: "Do sit down, you must be fatigued after your journey." He moved to the door. "I hate this half light, do you mind?"

He switched on the electricity and the bright wonder of the room danced suddenly before Timothy's eyes: the ceiling-high cases filled with books in their stately bindings; the mellow Dutch pictures; the dainty bronzes; the priceless Buhl-furniture; the proud Diana in the far corner glowing divinely white; the Buhl writing-table with its alabaster-shaded lamp; all blending into an impression of luxurious comfort. Involuntarily he looked around in admiration.

"A museum and a home," said Moordius, following his glance. "Part and parcel of myself; to give it up would break my heart."

He took from the mantelpiece a Sèvres snuff-box, with a painted medallion on the lid, handled it lovingly between his soft palms and brought it over to Timothy.

"This is a Boucher. It belonged to Madame du Barry. One of the gems of my collection. Did you ever see anything more beautiful? That's where my true life has lain."

He sighed and replaced the precious object. In the bright light Timothy saw him, clearly, for the first time. He had aged in a few weeks. The pinkiness had gone from his cheeks, which were pale and flabby. His benevolent eyes had narrowed into wolfishness. The dropped mask, so it struck Timothy, had not been reassumed. He looked like a man hunted to death. He swung round to Timothy.

"I suppose even you can understand what it means to break up all this—this living organism created by the love of three generations?"

Timothy remained silent for a moment, striving to

assimilate the new idea. Once more, he underwent the ascendancy of the man who had his being in spheres remote from his own.

"It would be rather dreadful," he admitted.

"All will have to go—under the hammer," said Moordius.

Timothy gasped. It was Moordius's way of telling him the long expected news.

"Then it's true?"

"Quite true. Within a very short time, unless a miracle happens, Moordius & Co. will stop payment. I'm staving off the evil day. You'll see how tomorrow. That means," he waved a hand around, "all this gone for ever."

The candid soul of Timothy recognized a note of sincerity in his voice, a note vibrating with a real passion. This man whom he knew now to be gambler, spendthrift, voluptuary, unscrupulous, was held by one fine bond to a life on a plane where art and music and all such sweet uncomprehended things mingled together in something sacred that was beauty.

"I'm sorry," said inarticulate Timothy.

"I knew you would be," Moordius answered. "It's so easy to destroy. So difficult to create. And you, my dear friend, you will have to face the wreck of all you have built up in the past year, your ambitions, your dear domestic ideals."

"I know; I've been driven half crazy."

"And all for the immediate want of a poor five million francs to turn the corner—a hundred thousand pounds. It would be laughable were it not tragic. . . . Come, come," he said, "can't you be sensible?"

"I wish I could," Timothy groaned, with his head in his hands; "but I can't."

"Think it over again," said Moordius. He sighed. "Well, well, that's enough before dinner—you're dining here, of course."

Timothy raised his head.

"No, I'm not dining with you, Moordius."

"It's a pity. My chef will be heartbroken," said the other coolly. "If you'll be so kind as to come back between half past nine and ten, we can resume the conversation."

"No," cried Timothy, rising. "Let us have it out now, once and for all."

"Perhaps it would be best. From the broad general point of view, there's not very much more to say. We can go into details tomorrow. But there's one question of principle I should like to discuss now. It concerns my marriage with Suzanne. I've arranged for it to take place in a few days. When and where is my happy secret. But all is settled save the formalities of signing the marriage contract before a notary." He took a document from the drawer of the Buhl table. "This is the draft. Look through it at your leisure. You will see that it is scrupulously drawn according to the terms of your written consent. The *régime de séparation des biens*. I presume you cannot go back on your word—contest your signature."

"I can't contest my signature," said Timothy.

"Of course. It would be absurd," said Moordius. "Well, here's the draft contract. You will see it's in two columns—the English translation by the side of the French. It's obvious now, my dear friend, that Suzanne's speedy disposal of her fortune is inevitable. The

question is: won't our marriage be too late to save the bank?"

Said Timothy: "What do you propose?"

Moordius drew a breath of relief at the fool's weakening, and, for the first time, the benevolent smile relit his face.

"There's nothing to prevent us from raising the money on the securities in London."

"Except the fear of gaol," said Timothy, very white.

Moordius sank into an arm-chair and puffed for a while at his cigar.

"Perhaps we're—both of us—in danger of that already."

"How?" cried Timothy, a new terror running through him from his feet to the roots of his hair.

Moordius laughed. "Oh, my dear Timothy. I really love you. You're the sweetest of fools. If I hadn't loved you I could have easily saved myself all this bother by having you painlessly put out of the way."

He slid the smooth running chair backwards a yard or two to a locked cabinet, which he opened with a key selected from the bunch in his trousers pocket. He looked with a new, diabolical humour, at a very puzzled Timothy.

"I suppose nothing would make you agree to raising that money?"

"Nothing on earth," said Timothy.

Moordius groped in the drawer for a few moments and presently drew from it a little feathered dart an inch long.

"This is a poisoned dart of New Guinea. Just a prick and a man expires very soon afterwards in a pretty agony."

Timothy limped toward him, the sweat on his forehead, his fists clenched.

"What the devil do you mean?"

Moordius, with malevolent playfulness, warded him off with the threatening point. A new and ghastly expression over-spread his face. His little lips closed until scarcely a mouth was perceptible, and his eyes narrowed into green slits.

"Just a prick," he repeated. "A prick on the hand—anywhere. There are ten poisons used. Eight have been discovered by Western science. The remaining two haven't. Keep away, my dear Timothy. Lead me not into temptation."

It was all so sudden, so grotesque, so horrible. Timothy could only gasp out:

"Good God. Why should you want to murder me?"

"Wouldn't I be sole trustee, under that old swine's will?"

He made a peck at him. Timothy staggered back. Moordius rose, holding the dart, his bunch of keys, which dangled from the chain attached to his brace-button, clanking at his knees, forced Timothy in retreat towards the writing-table.

"If you touch me, Timothy, you're bound to get scratched."

Timothy, his back against the table, could go no further. He realized that he was in deadly peril. Yet, for the moment, his outer consciousness was fixed only on a beastly crinkling of the skin of the bald scalp once so pink and smooth. Otherwise he stood bemused with horror.

Said Moordius: "On the blotting pad behind you is a

letter to the manager of the London and County Bank about the loan. Go and sign it."

Timothy drew himself up. The absurd universe was rocking; but his soul remained steadfast.

"I'll see you damned first," said he.

Moordius manœuvred him round to the writing chair, the deadly little dart always between his fingers.

"You had better sign," said he.

Timothy's eyes involuntarily sought the blotting-pad. On its virginal white there was no vestige of a letter. Suddenly, as Moordius made a short pace forward, he felt a sudden tiny sting on his arm. The room began to turn round and he stumbled half fainting into the writing chair. Moordius's face became that of a devil grinning through a mist. Thus a minute or two passed.

Presently Moordius broke into a shrill cackle of laughter and clapped Timothy on the shoulder.

"Look, my dear old hero, it's all foolishness——" Under Timothy's eyes he jabbed the dart into the back of his wrist and showed him the speck of blood. "All a joke. A damned good joke." He laughed immoderately, hysterically, so that he could not speak; crossed to the cabinet, threw the dart into the drawer and locked it. "Oh, my dear Timothy, fancy your thinking me such a clumsy villain as to murder you in my own house! It was comic to see you." His mirth again exploded. "Oh dear! oh dear!" He wiped streaming brow and eyes, while Timothy sat watching him in indignant bewilderment across the table.

For a while no word was spoken. Moordius turned his back on Timothy, who saw him stagger and rest his hand on the cabinet for support. Then he walked

slowly to a corner of the room to a table on which stood a small Venetian carafe and some liqueur glasses. He filled a glass and drank it off. His back still turned, he held the carafe poised.

"This is old Vodhka, from a Grand Duke's cellars, long before the war. Will you have some?"

"No," said Timothy.

Moordius shrugged his shoulders and tossed off a second glass. He turned, and Timothy beheld the Moordius, elderly, lined, sallow, grave, revealed to him by the first flood of the electric light.

"You must forgive me for putting you to this absurd test," he said in his most courteous tones. "It was a sudden impulse on my part. You've been listening to such fairy tales about me that I thought I might trade on your credulity. And when I saw that you believed the silly toy was poisoned, it was only in human nature to continue the experiment. And the experiment has proved to me that you're a man who prefers death to dishonour. At least, what, unfortunately, you most wrongly think to be dishonour. You're a very brave man, Timothy, and I humbly beg your pardon for my foolish jest."

Timothy struggled to his feet. "You've always said I've no sense of humour. Perhaps you're right. That's the kind of jest I don't appreciate."

Moordius approached him and held out his hand.

"Come, come, I can't do more than apologize very sincerely. The bank's ruined. I'm ruined. Valerie's ruined. You, yourself, are ruined. Your ambitions for your little daughter dispersed into thin air. But your conscience raises you above the cataclysm of all our hopes. It is my proud privilege to be associated with a

noble human soul. You will never hear a word again of these proposals."

On the ears of Timothy, disregarding the proffered hand, these honeyed words fell savourless. To Moordius's flattery he had, in the first place, owed his approaching downfall; and, as he had confessed, he had no sense of humour.

"Suppose I had funked it and said I would sign?"

"Why—you see for yourself there was nothing there to sign."

"But you had something ready, in the drawer you took this from," he tapped the draft of the marriage settlement in his breast-pocket.

Suddenly inspired, he pulled open the drawer of the Buhl table and picked up the first typewritten sheet to hand. Moordius sprang forward and snatched it away.

"How dare you touch my private papers?" he cried in sudden rage. He retreated far into the room, crumpling up the sheet which he thrust into his pocket. Then recovering himself:

"You poor fool, do you think bankers make enormous loans on the strength of a typewritten letter? You ought to know as well as I do that it's a matter of delicate personal negotiations. Has the past year taught you nothing?"

Timothy limped from behind the table. "My authorization for you to act for us both was all that was necessary. I'm not quite the fool you think me. Let me see that paper."

The sluggish anger of the gentle creature was at last unloosened. For the first time in his life he lost count of external things, impelled by a furious physical purpose. He would claw and maul Moordius from head to heel in

order to get that crushed-up ball of paper. His lameness gave him an uncanny crab-like scamper. He was tall, muscular in his upper limbs, young. Moordius retreated to the bookcase and Timothy stood over him with uplifted fist. For a while they looked into each other's eyes and then Moordius yielded and handed Timothy the paper.

"You're quite right, my dear fellow," said he, evenly. "The fundamental mistake which old Joe Grabbiter made in the first place, and I, in the second, was to underrate your acumen."

Timothy did not reply to the taunt, but, having scanned the document that awaited his signature, tore it up and threw the fragments on the carpet and made his way in silence to the door.

"Are you going?" asked Moordius.

"You see I am," said Timothy.

"Allow me," said Moordius.

With sardonic courtesy he accompanied him to the front door of the apartment and rang for the lift.

"We meet tomorrow morning at my office. Eleven o'clock. By then you'll have looked through the contract. Of course, any modifications——"

"Tell me," Timothy interrupted, "where is Suzanne?"

"I don't know, my dear fellow," Moordius replied coolly.

"That's another foolish lie," said Timothy.

"Ah! Why did I not appreciate your brain before," said Moordius.

The lift came up; the liveried attendant threw open the gates and stepped out cap in hand. Moordius crossed the landing.

"Good night."

Timothy about to enter the lift was recalled by Moordius, whose head and shoulders were thrust through the door ajar of the flat.

"I have some darts which really are poisoned," he said, with a laugh, and shut the door quickly.

CHAPTER XX

FEELING more dead than alive, after this amazing interview, Timothy stumbled about the Avenue Gabriel, unable to clear his eyes from the vision of the malignant creature playing his madman's farce with the dart. It had been eerie, non-human, a scene re-enacted from the stage of the Grand Guignol, whither, on a previous visit, Suzanne had once conducted him. At the time he had believed in it, had seen himself at the gates of death. Moordius's purpose might be obvious; but what complications of the brain had suggested the ghastly experiment? His confused mind found no solution. And the final threat? Did he mean that he might pursue him in the dark, deal his blow, and disappear unperceived? Timothy shuddered, and limped on.

At the corner of the rue Royale he paused, waiting to cross. Suddenly he felt faint and dizzy. He would never dare to risk the plunge from the kerb to the island shelter. He looked helplessly right and left. The terrace lights of the cafés and restaurants up the street caught his eye. He remembered that he had had no food since the midday chop in the train to Dover. He made his way into Maxim's. A *maître d'hôtel* bowed him to a vacant table in a corner. The noise of the jazz music and shrieking talk suggested to his tortured brain a descent into Hell. He stared vacantly into the flabby face of the *maître d'hôtel* who, recognizing the unmistakable nationality of the untidy, tweed-clad stranger, rattled off an English translation of the bill of fare.

"Cold beef," said Timothy.

"No soup? No fish?"

"Cold beef," said Timothy.

"Pickles?"

Timothy waved him away desperately with both hands. "Cold beef," he repeated.

A worrying wasp in a black apron, set before him the *carte des vins* open at the champagne page, a black-rimmed finger against a number.

"C'est très bon. Very good."

"Yes. All right," said Timothy, unaware of what he had ordered.

Anything to get rid of the fellow. All he needed was food and drink. Left alone, amid the infernal racket, he buried his face in his hands. . . . Moordius, always Moordius; Moordius from the fresh pink and grey figure of a year ago to the malignant creature of the evening; Moordius, in all his manifestations, passed before him in a *danse maccabre*. . . . Had not a waiter touched his arm he might have stayed there, stupefied, half the night. Aroused, he saw on the table a dish of daintily carved beef and ham garnished with diamonds of jelly and sliced gherkins and a cool yellow and green salad, an ice-pail glistening with water-drops from which projected a golden-necked bottle, and a glass of winking golden liquid at his right hand.

Mechanically he ate and drank. It was only when he had consumed the food and saw the *sommelier* emptying the bottle into his glass, that he realized that he had drunk nearly a quart of champagne. The discovery was a shock. In normal circumstances he would not have dreamed of ordering champagne. Had he, indeed, ordered it? He leaned back against the cushioned seat, for

the first time conscious of the noisy gaiety around; of the scene; of the compact mass of white tables with their shaded lamps; of the variegated colours of women's dresses; of their bare necks and arms and pearls and diamonds, their faces, their laughter; of the chess-board contrast of the men's black and white; of the hurry and skurry of waiters; of the band; of the first violin threading a fascinating musical way through the room. His brain was clear at last. He looked at the glass of wine and drank it slowly and appreciatively. It was indeed very good. Wonderful what food and drink could do for an exhausted man. He was a match now for a thousand Moordiuses. He paid the fantastic bill without a thought and went out into the street and suffered himself to be escorted to a taxi summoned by an eager chasseur. Two minutes brought him to the Hotel Continental.

"What a fool I was not to have remembered how near it was," he said to himself. But it didn't matter. The hearty meal and the wine had saved his life; or if not his life, at least his reason.

At the desk he enquired about his room; found everything in order; his luggage had been carried up. He filled in the necessary police form. A page was detailed to conduct him. As he was approaching the lift, a woman rose from a seat in the long lounge and rushed up to him.

"Oh, Timothy. What have you been doing all this time? I thought you'd never come."

After a confused instant he recognized Valerie. She wore a dark hat and a thin silk cloak thrown over a light morning dress into which she had changed after travelling. His thoughts rushed back to his scene with Moordius.

"What has happened?" he asked anxiously.

"It's for you to tell me. After you left, he gave way to one of his rages. Came to my room and cursed us both. Put his hands round my neck and said he'd like to strangle me. He did it before—long ago——! I felt that something dreadful must have happened between you; so, as soon as he had gone, I slipped out. I couldn't rest tonight without seeing you. Where can we talk?"

Their eyes swept the vast public spaces of the lounge.

"Why not upstairs," said Timothy, with a motion to the waiting lift.

A pale smile passed over her lips. Why not? This was no time for the observance of silly conventions.

They mounted to a high floor, the imperturbable page leading them through silent corridors. In the formally furnished hotel bedroom, she cast aside hat and cloak, while he opened the window through which rose the sounds of the ceaseless traffic of the rue Castiglione and the rue de Rivoli.

"Tell me. He threatened you, didn't he? I know him so well. If it suits him, he'll carry out his threats. Otherwise he'll let them dangle over your head."

"His behaviour this evening was certainly extraordinary," Timothy admitted.

"Anything abnormal—cruelty?"

Timothy stuffed and lit his pipe. He had recovered balance and could look at things clearly. The word was a clue to the Grand Guignol mystery.

"A bit," said he.

"I thought so. He gives himself away sometimes—when the instinct becomes uncontrollable. Then he's furious for he prides himself on his subtlety. If I asked you for details you wouldn't give them to me?" And

seeing him shake his head, she went on: "You're loyal to something, I don't quite know what. After all, I'm his daughter, you say. Well, it doesn't matter. Before you let Suzanne marry him, you've got to know how my father has treated me all my life long. If you've had a taste of his cruelty, you'll no longer think me mad. Do you want to know?"

"I think I'd better," said Timothy, sitting on a straight-backed chair.

"If you had cared a bit for me—oh, in the only way—I should have opened my heart to you long ago. But you didn't. I was afraid. I couldn't fling a mangled rag of a woman at you and ask you to take her out of pity. Yet I ought to have told you for the sake of Suzanne. I felt if I didn't come to you tonight it would be too late. You're a kind of inverted St. Thomas, Timothy. He wouldn't believe in Christ till he had proofs. You won't believe in the Devil until you have proofs. Today you wouldn't believe that my father sent me over to marry you."

"I believe now," said he. "I'm ready to believe anything you tell me."

There was a knock at the door. Valerie uttered a little cry of terror. If it were he! It would be like him to have followed her up and got them in this trap. Timothy opened the door to the enquiring face of the chambermaid. It was to make the bed and ask if Monsieur had need of anything. If she deranged Monsieur, he only had to ring when he was ready. She retired. Valerie lay back and dabbed a moist brow with her handkerchief. Her silly nerves. Timothy must forgive her. He limped to his stiff chair. Both cast instinctive glances around. There was no touch of allurement in the room's comfortless

negation of intimacy. His unpacked suit-case in a corner with hat and coat thrown over it was the only sign of possible human habitation. It was a lifeless room, austere as the parlour of a convent.

The woman suffered a few moments reaction. She rose and went to the window and looked down on the clashing, flashing life of Paris, a myriad isolated souls whirling through space intent on their separate vanities and tragedies, as remote from one another as the stars dimly visible, there, above the Louvre. By craning round her head she could just see the column of the Place Vendôme and the statue on top dreaming serene in the moonlight above the fevered turbulence of men. Timothy came up and, in his kind way, put his hand on her shoulder.

"I don't think we shall be disturbed again."

Suddenly she began to cry softly, feeling as lonely as the figure on the top of the column and yet as fevered as the phantasmagoria of the human whirl below. Timothy, disconcerted, kept on patting her back.

"My dear child. My dear child——"

Her shoulders heaved beneath his touch. "If only you cared just a little for me——"

"But I do," he said truly. "I'm awfully fond of you."

He felt her draw his hand down and kiss it miserably. He heard her say:

"Do you think I would have obeyed my father, if it hadn't been my heart's desire?"

Then the scales fell from Timothy's eyes. He knew that she was but a simple woman, mysteriously tortured, who for some unknown reason had given him the gift of her love. Her lips were soft on his hand. The hand instinctively closed around the oval chin, and, as he

stepped back, brought the face and the yielding body towards him. So she fell into his arms and he held her close. She murmured foolishly:

"Oh, I love you, Timothy. Didn't you know it? I never loved any one before. I've dreamed such dreams of happiness. You and I and the beloved children. In the soul of me, dear, I'm only a wife and a mother, just content with *deux sous d'amour*."

The fragrance of her dark hair was in his nostrils, the surrender of her upturned face before his eyes, the warm breath of her on his lips, the softness of her lithe body against him. He kissed her. Could mortal man do otherwise? The embrace was long, feeding the starved soul of the woman.

At last they broke away, both dazed, and regarded each other ever so little self-consciously.

Timothy, under the Undine spell of her said—and for his upright soul there was nothing else to say:

"If you'll marry a ruined man—there's nothing before us but poverty—no trust but in God——"

"And in ourselves."

"Will you?"

She made a few paces towards the window, irresolute, twisting a wisp of a handkerchief between her hands. Then she turned, sank in the arm-chair and, looking up at him, caught his arm and drew him down by her side. Her fingers wandered over his hair.

"I don't know why I should spoil the only moment's happiness I've ever known."

"Neither do I," said Timothy.

"But I must. It wouldn't be decent of me. It's doubly necessary for me to tell you everything now. I can't give you my answer till you've heard. I wouldn't

marry you under false pretences. Besides, there's Suzanne."

It took some time of argument and wretched beginnings before she could plunge into the full tide of the story she had set herself to tell. Perhaps if Timothy had been of the conquering sort and had lifted her again on the wings of passion, she would, womanlike, have soared with him and forgotten for the precious hour the fixed idea that had driven her forth. But Timothy lay at her feet, not conqueror but conquered; won by her wooing. So she must justify herself in his eyes.

"I'm telling my inmost heart to you, Timothy. I've never done it before to a human being. . . . No one has any conception of what my life has been. Even you can't understand what it means to have lived from earliest memories under the grip of a cold terror. I've done it. I've lived that life. The wonder is that I'm a normal woman at all. Perhaps I'm not. It's for you to judge. But everything I say is true.

"My first childish memory—it stays vivid now—is that of my father standing over my bed, when I was five, and of his two soft hands—those white hands have been a terror to me ever since—fingering my throat, so that I screamed and screamed and the nurse came rushing into the room. That was the beginning of the terror. From that day till now I remember nothing but a lifetime of his vindictive hatred; I know it's horrible for a daughter to speak like this, but it's true. God knows, as a little child, I gave him no cause for it. It's only since I've been a woman that I've dared face him in public. And he has checkmated me by saying I am mad. He is cruelty incarnate. I tried to warn Suzanne. I used words which weren't hysterical. I said: 'My father is

a devil.' She laughed and thought I was crazy." She leaned forward and clutched his shoulder. "Timothy, he is a devil. There's no cruelty of which he's not capable. You saw it for yourself this evening. It's a vice he hides from the world, of course. Most people think him artistic, sympathetic, wonderful. His whole nature is sensuousness, sensuality and cruelty. . . . Somebody gave me a little dog—a fox terrier puppy. I don't think he knew of it. It's so long ago. Anyhow the puppy got into his library. He hates animals. I think he's afraid of them. They read him. . . . He found the puppy there and sent for me and dismissed my nurse. He said: 'Children and puppies in this house must behave themselves.' And he took the puppy by the neck and the stump of its tail and pulled it and savaged it until he threw it into a corner, dead.

"He glared me out, saying: 'Don't let me have to do that to you one of these days.'

"I could tell you things true that you couldn't believe. The marvel is that I have retained my sanity. He has beaten me, as a child, until I fainted. I had a nurse, a woman of awful life, whom he paid extravagantly for her secrecy. When she became dangerous, he managed to lure her into a crime for which she got seven years' penal servitude—and she died in prison. I alone know, because he has told me. Oh yes; he's cynical enough for that.

"Have you ever noticed a white scar on the fleshy side of his left hand?"

Timothy, horror-struck, nodded. It was the only disfigurement on Moordius's pink and white person.

"I did it. My teeth when I was fifteen. I bit him, because he was beating me for nothing—no, I'm wrong—

I'd better tell the whole truth. I used to lie awake weaving fantastic dreams of childish vengeance. He had kept me indoors for three June days because I hadn't rushed in and thrown my arms round his neck and called him *'mon cher papa'* at one of his parties. I found the key of his cigar cabinet and made a fire of thousands in the grate. It was a term of real warfare between us. I don't see I was to blame. I got in where I could—and a young girl's chance is small. . . . He nearly beat me to death, until my teeth got hold of his hand. I nearly bit it through. I can taste the blood now. I've never got rid of it and never shall get rid of it. I don't want to get rid of it. That's my part of the confession.

"Since then he has seldom offered me physical violence. In that way he's afraid of me. He has realized that between a child with merciless teeth and a desperate woman with a knife, there's not much difference. Yet a few days ago he nearly broke my arm. That's how I came to upset the glass at dinner. And this evening, after twenty years, the same white fingers crept round my throat. Still he kept his hands off me, as a general rule. Instead he invented a system of subtle malignity. He would never send me to school. He had governesses over whom he threw the spell of his beastly charm. I was the despair of his life, almost the *donna delinquente* of Lombroso. None would listen to me. In their presence he fawned on me, as you've seen him fawn. Alone with me, he lashed me with his tongue—accusing me of vices of which I had never heard and which I could not understand. All the foul language of the Paris 'Halles' I learned from him. It was his delight to hold out a girlish pleasure—a visit to the Louvre—the Cirque Médrano, the *Comédie Français,* and then to taunt me into rebellion,

so that he could say to Mademoiselle Chose—'Desolated, Mademoiselle, but Valerie has so misconducted herself towards me that I cannot allow her to go out this afternoon.'

"I could go on for hours and hours telling you the hell I have gone through. The hell of a lifetime. A hell of calculated torture from my earliest infancy to the present moment. To you, staring at me with your good, kind face, it's incredible. But it's true.

"At eighteen I tried to run away. I was a fool. I stole some money out of a drawer and bribed a housemaid to help me. I ran away to the first place that occurred to me. Lyons. What I was going to do I don't know. I had four thousand francs on me, which seemed a fortune. At the station at Lyons, while I was standing bewildered, wondering where to go, a charming elderly lady came up to me and entered into conversation. A *jeune fille* alone in Lyons? The dangers of the place. Marvellous to relate, she kept a high-class *pension*. Would I accompany her? I did. She was so charming. I trusted her implicitly. I drove home with her. You can guess what she was. Nothing happened to me except a day and a night's phantasmagoria of horror. In the morning my father came, bland and smiling—took me away. The housemaid had sold me. He had arranged the whole comedy. He was cynical enough to tell me so, in the Lyons-Paris train. I never dared run away again. It was then that he sent me to Frélon. He broke my spirit, cowed me, I lived under the terror of him.

"He's not a man. He's a devil. How I've survived with my reason, again I say I don't know, except perhaps because I have made it my aim in life to pit myself

against him and thwart him and show my contempt for him in public, at every opportunity. He has retaliated by declaring me mad. My husband's death in the war gave him this pretext.

"I had just a liking but no love for my husband. I knew very little of him before we were married. He came to the house in the early part of the war. Fell in love with me. I married him to escape from my father. He was my one hope of salvation. My father had foreseen it. He had got him into his power—financially—God knows how. When my husband left me to return to the front, I clung to him and begged him to take me away, send me to his own people, do anything so that I should not remain in Paris. He said it was hopeless for the moment, as he had already given my father full power of attorney—or something of the kind. As soon as he could arrange things otherwise, he would. My married life lasted exactly a fortnight. He went back to die at Salonika, leaving a bankrupt estate. How my father juggled it, I don't know. No one knows. Captain Doon's partner on the Stock Exchange, who was hammered soon afterwards, doesn't exactly know. He can only attribute it to my husband's wild international speculations. So I'm penniless, save for my father's bounty. He gives me the choice of remaining with him or walking out on to the street to starve or do worse. If I had the courage to go away and try to earn my own living—and, my God! how could I do it?—his malignity would follow me up and check me at every turn. And who would believe my story?

"At Biarritz last year, there was a Spanish Duke, a Grandee of Spain, discreetly in love with me; so discreetly that even Suzanne with her quick brain suspected

nothing. As he had wife and children, there was no question of marriage. He made the usual proposals. Perhaps if he hadn't dribbled at the corners of his lips I might have accepted them. A desperate woman can do all sorts of horrible things. Then one day my father came to me.

" 'If you're dissatisfied with me, the Duke will give you all you want, and I, my darling child'—you know his damned benevolent smile—'will bestow you on him with my paternal blessing.'

"And then I called him foul names and said I hoped he would get back the money he had lent the Duke. But he smiled and shook his head. He had already bled the Duke in anticipation.

"You may think, my dear, that this is a fairy tale of evil. But it's true. I've been telling you bald facts in simple language. Have I spoken like a hysterical woman? I've suppressed rather than exaggerated. I've only tried to put into a few minutes the story of the torture of a lifetime. Can you wonder that I hate him?"

She seemed to forget Timothy's presence, and the transmuting angel wings of love that had enfolded them a while ago. She sat wrought to a white passion.

"Yes, I hate him. I hate him. It has been the only meaning of my life for twenty years. Every day for twenty years I've wished him dead. . . . And he's my father. The unnatural horror of it! I've put myself to sleep of nights thinking of ways to kill him. Often I've dreamed I did kill him—— What am I, his daughter? Am I as great a devil as he? For I want to kill him!"

"Stop, stop!" cried Timothy, scrambling to his feet. "Murder! Good God, no!"

In his usual way when agitated he began to limp about the room. The scene of nightmare returned. His faith in her was absolute; the hideous story was one not of the good commonplace earth, but of some mephitic world wherein dwelt devils and lost souls. Among them the frail suicide, he remembered, with the razor-slashed face.

"Oh, my God, my God!" said he.

And unbidden there arose the spectre of old Joe Grabbiter, grinning, from this unhallowed welter. Timothy limped about as one distraught. Valerie recovered herself and followed him anxiously with her eyes, fearful lest she had too deeply shocked his sensitive soul.

"That's my confession," she said. "That's why I said you must judge me."

Though he scarcely heard her, the words tapping on his brain caused co-ordination of thought. Joe Grabbiter! The old sinner had arisen from hell to point out the way, even though it were against his will. The word "exorcism" fastened itself on his mind. He knew little of its meaning save that of the casting out of devils. He rejected it as foolish—yet it brought a matter-of-fact inspiration.

The moment had come to relieve her tormented conscience. What had passed between them that night freed his own conscience from the bonds of secrecy. He stood motionless, searching for some formula of revelation, while the woman watched him with increasing fear, for he had not given an answer. Nerves on edge, she cried:

"Why don't you say something?"

He turned and approached her gravely. "I have an

extraordinary thing to say to you. It's something that no one in this world knows besides myself. Last of all, Moordius."

Her face was all bewilderment at the unexpected change of ground.

"What is it?"

"Moordius isn't your father," said he.

She sprang up, straight and stiff. Reflex brought the mechanical question.

"What do you say?"

"Moordius isn't your father."

She pressed her hand to her brow. "Is it you who are mad now?"

"No, my dear," said Timothy, "I've not enough imagination to go mad. I can only deal in hard facts."

"I don't understand," she said, almost stupidly. "If he's not my father, why——? What is the meaning of it all? Who am I?"

"Your mother was Moordius's wife. Oh, I'm sorry. So sorry——"

She waved away his delicacy. "Oh, that doesn't matter. Poor woman, who could blame her? But I? My father?"

"Joseph Grabbiter. The man of the will. Suzanne's uncle."

She sat down again and for a long time did not speak, but rubbed her thin hands nervously together, as though cleansing them.

"Thank God," she said at last. "I can deal with him now."

The words struck the keynote of her attitude until she left him.

It did not occur to her to doubt; it was almost a matter of formality to demand how he had come into possession of the astounding secret. Timothy told her all he knew—from Moordius plucking the flower beneath Grabbiter's eyes to his own discovery of the letters in the Empire escritoire bequeathed to Moordius. His narrative was as bald as the evidence of a police constable. But her intuition pierced into the heart of things. She laughed at his unconvincing suggestion that Grabbiter had forgotten the existence of the letters. Dear old Timothy, as usual, trying to save any one pain!

"I don't seem to have much luck in fathers!" she said. "Both devils. Anyhow, the real one's dead."

"Don't you see," she said, later, "that the whole of the will was a diabolical trap of vengeance?"

And Timothy, who had seen it all along, was compelled to admit that she was right.

"What I can't understand is, why he didn't leave you his fortune and instruct his executors to produce the letters as proof that you are his daughter. In that way he would have taken his revenge——"

She shrugged away the proposition, which, to Timothy's perplexity, did not seem greatly to interest her. Paramount in her mind was the exultant fact that Moordius was not her father. She always came back to Moordius.

"He has known all the time," she cried on a queer note.

"How could he?" asked Timothy.

"Of course he has. It's obvious now in a thousand million ways. Doesn't it account for his bloody torture of me all these years?"

In a second she lost control, stood over him, half bent

with outstretched hand and outspread fingers, her dark eyes ablaze in a white mask.

"Hasn't he taken me, a helpless thing, baby, child, girl, woman to wreak his horrible vengeance on? Haven't I been the scapegoat of those two men's hatred? Hasn't the knowledge that I was the other man's child given spice to his lust of cruelty?"

She overwhelmed him with a turbulent flood of words. In the midst of it all she checked herself suddenly.

"There's no use talking any more. You'll never understand what this means to me. It's getting late." She glanced at the marble clock on the mantelpiece. "Two in the morning. I must go."

She pinned on her hat hurriedly and caught up her cloak.

Said Timothy: "My dear, there's a whole world of things we've got to say to each other."

"We'll say them tomorrow, when we've got—what do you call it—a sense of perspective."

"We haven't spoken of Suzanne," said Timothy.

Her gesture dismissed Suzanne to the uttermost ends of the earth.

"Suzanne can look after herself."

With a woman wrought to such a pitch there was no argument.

"I must go," she said. "I am tired to death."

They went, in silence, down the ghostly corridors to the lift.

"I'll see you home, of course," said he.

"No. The night porter will find me a taxi."

"I'll come down with you."

They stood together outside the unlocked gates. The summoned cab drew up. They held the hurried argu-

ment of his escort. She prevailed. She must be alone. Just before entering the cab, she turned and regardless of night porter and taxi-man threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"I didn't mean what I said upstairs. I'll look after Suzanne."

CHAPTER XXI

THERE is a monticule high up in the bosom of the Maritime Alps, set like an outer bastion defending a gorge; and on the crown of the monticule is a yellowish cluster of stone, from which emerges the stunted tower of a church and the red-tiled roof of the machicolated tower of a château. When first you sight it from the winding road below, it looks like a mighty mountain stronghold. When viewed from the pass high above, it is dwarfed to a smiling hamlet on a hillock. Yet, in its time it was a fortress. From the top of the church tower which commands the gorge you can see straight down over the plain to the shimmering band of blue which is the sea; and there, in old days, men with good sight could see the specks of white which were the galleys of the Saracens approaching mercilessly to conquer and ravish and lay waste. As far as it can be traced from the sparse and imaginative records of this last corner of Provence, it withstood all Saracen attacks; a key position, never taken. But all the same, in subsequent centuries, it saw much fierce fighting and changing of hands. It is a battered, sun-baked place, whose few narrow streets, when the gradient is too steep, are frankly flights of crazy stairs. Its church has a barrel-romanesque roof, a Gothic asp and a late seventeenth-century West front stuck on by the pious pagan who controlled the destinies of Frélon. The tower stands apart, and beyond its equipment with a modern ironwork belfry, has nothing to do with the church. In front of the West door is an open circular resting-place, and to

protect the faithful from falling into the abyss of the gorge, there is a broad stone parapet, on which you can lounge and from which, if you are a pipe-smoking male, you can spit down with safety into infinity.

Cheek by jowl with the church is the hoary grey shell of the château, pierced with *meurtrières* below its crenellated battlements, newly restored, and topped with its red-roofed tower. It is all as grim as can be. But once admitted through the nail-studded, iron-clamped door, you enter into the amenity of pleasanter centuries; first, into a little Italian courtyard, with a renaissance staircase leading to the landing lit from above. And you go through small rooms, with windows pierced through the four-foot thickness of the walls, and at last emerge on the terrace—open to the mouth of the wild gorge and to the haze of the distant sea.

On this terrace, novel on her lap, sat Suzanne dreaming.

It was sufficiently past noon for the grey mountains to cast their violet shadows down the terraced slopes of the gorge. The other side baked in the sunshine. As far as the eye could reach, nothing but a medley of sheer grey rock, vivid patches of the tender green vines and young wheat, and of the yellow ploughed soil, on the stone-protected, ever descending terraces; everywhere the vivid white loops of the road; and above, the deep consistent blue of the sky. Below the terrace flamed the sudden May riot of the Southern garden. The bougainvillea glowed purple over the terrace walls, honeysuckle covered the terrace rail, roses hid the balustrade on each side of the marble stairs. Roses in the garden, carnations the colour of the lees of wine, lilies in white splendour, a fir tree clad to its summit in the last drooping blooms of

the wistaria, whose tender lavender stood out against the heliotrope marking the further parapet. It was a garden seemingly of wilderness, of haphazard bloom, savage, yet restful, in its defiant beauty.

With the promise of all this, Moordius had lured Suzanne to this château oi Frélon, and the promise had been redeemed in full. Here was a paradise of luxurious quietude. It was a breathing space, where she could be alone with loveliness, between the dusty London and Paris round, and the new and somewhat menaced life on which she was about to enter. In her heart she thanked him for his ever delicate perception. What other man, without a word from her, would so have divined her soul's unformulated needs?

For in London she had not been happy, in spite of the early season gaiety. To live beneath Timothy's roof, after what had happened, had been impossible. But then, who could quarrel with Timothy and keep a conscience quite serene? Even with a Timothy prejudiced, blinded, pig-headed and disastrous. Maddening though she might find it, she could not question his pure integrity. And here again Moordius came in with his matchless knowledge of the human heart and his infinite mansuetude. Had he not said to her: "Timothy's like a great faithful dog who kills your prize goose because he thinks it's going to eat your buttercups, and when you rate him and beat him, looks piteously into your eyes wondering how on earth he hasn't merited your praise."

So London, without, as with, Timothy, became unendurable. The children pulled her. To undo her tragic farewell would be anti-climax. To flutter butterfly-like in their sphere and disregard their existence savoured of child-treason. She also did not vastly care about the

frivolous folk with whom she went a-butterflying. None of them seemed to have their feet on solid ground; hers insistently clamoured for it. Here was the great crisis of her life and it behooved her to walk, not warily—that suggestion conveyed with bluntness by Timothy and with innuendo from here and there an acquaintance, she dismissed with passionate disdain—but securely, in the path it was her destiny to tread. For she knew that the man she loved was surrounded by enemies, maligned; was fighting with his back against the wall, imperturbable and heroic. In order to stand by his side her feet must be planted firm on the significant earth. And now Moordius, with his all-knowledge, had set her here, in Frélon, on the impregnable and eternal rock.

She was a-weary of unrealities, he said. Let her sojourn a while among the everlasting verities of mountain and sky and sea, and the unutterable wonder of flowers in her childhood's land. It was but a tiny castle, but she would find it as enchanted as the magic of her love could make it. And there, would she await his coming? Alas! not that of the prince of the fairy tale—lost the wizard's art that could wipe away the unalterable years—but that of the old king who had refound his youth in the love of the beautiful princess. Would she wait for him? Frélon was a commune, one of the tiniest in France, but it had a mayor, one Cabuchon, who sold to tourists petrol and picture postcards and warm beer at the Restaurant des Alpes Maritimes on the road at the foot of the hill; who, nevertheless, girding on a tricolour scarf, would be invested with the awful powers of the Republic and could marry them straight away. And immediately afterwards, there was the rusty curé of the church above, who would do all that was necessary to consecrate their union.

"Come and see."

He had whirled her down to the South. His wand of the millionaire magician had conjured up staff to supplement the old caretaker and his wife, and the best automobile in Grasse, which met them at Cannes station. He installed her Lady of the Domain. Lingered only for her ecstasy—it was a day of wonder, of azure sky and cleaning wind—and for her abandonment in his embrace. The next day she received a telegram from Cannes, where he had passed the night. It was in English.

> "Everything arranged for the 26th. For me heaven.
> For you, all my life can do to make it seem so."

Could world-conquering lover say more?

And now here she was waiting, in serious beatitude. She found full employment for her days, apart from reading and meditation. Mistress of the coast, she could revisit the dear haunts of her childhood, retrace the excursions made with her father in their little two-seater car. She walked along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice in the blazing sun, her eyes filled with tears; for the last time she had walked there it was in the pride of her *beau filleul de guerre,* Colonel Chastel. And there were old friends she could visit. . . . But she loved the cloistered peace of the château. Moordius had not lived there for years; but on his not infrequent rushes to Monte Carlo, he would dash over to see that all was in order, sometimes spending the night, so that his coming was always imminent to those in charge. And flowers were sent regularly to Paris.

She loved the sense of ownership of this historic old stronghold on the hill's pinnacle. Her loneliness gave it more than a touch of the romantic. Mounting to the

battlements she could watch the road along which he would pass to claim her. In by-gone days how many a high-born lady had stood there watching for the glitter of spear points and harness that betokened her lord's approach! Glittering spears or flash of car on the white ribbon of road, it was all the same in essence. On the day appointed again a woman would be watching there, with her heart in her eyes. It was to be their real home, he had promised; hitherto there had been no influence to endear it to him; now its soullessness would be redeemed by her inspiring spirit. It would be her re-creation. The practical joined hands with the romantic. Day after day she invented a new improvement, the romantic joyously peeping even down to the kitchen sink. There were rooms to be rearranged, refurnished, colours to be thought out. Put into writing, her schemes took the form almost of a specification. And then, she could dream, as she dreamed that early afternoon, on the cool terrace in front of the enchanted garden.

At one time she had taken for granted an elaborate wedding at the Madeleine, with half a dozen officiating clergy and their train of acolytes and choristers, and with all Paris shimmering in the vast dim church. A reception afterwards at the Ritz. A blaze of publicity in which she would be the proud and central figure. Naught of which is unattractive even to the most level-headed of young women. Indeed, she had had it in her mind to face all Paris defiantly; to make it obvious that she was not the captive of his bow and spear, like any silly, blushing young thing; but that she had chosen him as he had chosen her, a free woman, mistress of her destiny. But he had pleaded, as only he could plead, for this tranquil marriage. "Come and see," he had said,

leaving the choice in her hands. She had come; she had seen; and there was scarcely any balance to hold. Beauty and romance knocked worldliness sky-high. Unutterably sweeter to be married in Frélon; far nearer to God in the little barrel-roofed church, built by pious hands, than in the sham Roman temple of the Madeleine.

Besides—and here came in the seriousness of her beatitude—wasps might have buzzed about the great public function; enemies, calumniators, poisoning her happiness with tongue or pen. For herself she would have defied them all; telling them in a hundred ways to go to the devil, as she had told old Joe Grabbiter. "You will have infinite opportunities of doing so, my sweet Amazon," he had said, "after we're married. Don't waste your strength on shadows." It was only by such light insinuations that she knew him to be fighting a great battle. The steel in her stiffened. She would fight by his side.

There was not a breath of wind; the flowers slept; in the far distance the sea was a pond of blue. Suzanne lay in the long cane chair, her feet up, her hands behind her head. The little ironic smile played around her lips. The time of her soul's purification had lasted long enough. Not that she was tired of waiting and desired the cancellation of the days intervening between now and the date fixed for the wedding; but she craved the fascination of his presence. She was in a mood of some sort, she knew not what. He, if he stood before her now, would divine it instantly. A word or two from him, and there would be a queer electric shock in her physical being and she would respond with her lips and brain and vigour. In her young pride she had never dreamed that she could

be under the mastery of a man. But then she had never dreamed of a man like Moordius. As she lay there supine in the heavy scented afternoon, he absorbed her thoughts. The quiver of a laugh fluttered over her bosom. All her independence had gone. She was his to do what he liked with. She wanted him unspeakably. The moment was that of her entire surrender.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle!"

She regained consciousness of external things with a start and whisked legs and skirt from the foot-rest of the chair. The man-servant was standing by her holding a silver tray on which lay a telegram. She took it with a smile and dismissed the man. It was Moordius's way to send her unexpected lover's messages. She opened the folded blue paper and read:

"Something dreadful has happened. Serious accident. Come to Paris at once. TIMOTHY."

She sprang with a gasp to her feet, stared at the paper until she grew blinded. The sunshine went out and the colour faded from the flowers.

Something dreadful indeed must have happened, since it was Timothy and not Moordius who telegraphed—Timothy, obviously summoned on that account to Paris. Yet during the lapse of the day necessary for Timothy's journey to Paris, why had not Joseph, who alone save Moordius, knew her address, communicated with her direct? If the accident had been serious enough to warrant the summoning of Timothy, *a fortiori* she should have been sent for first. Perhaps Moordius had forbidden it.

It was nearly three o'clock. She had lost the *rapide*

from Cannes, the only train she knew of. She sped swiftly through the room to the courtyard in search of the chauffeur. She found him polishing the brasswork of the car.

A train? Yes. There was the six something from Cannes, a slow train getting into Paris some time in the afternoon—between three and four. She wrung her hands.

"And always late."

"*Que voulez-vous,* Mademoiselle? A train-omnibus stopping at every station is bound to be late."

"That would mean five or six at the earliest before I could get to Paris."

The man saw her despair. What had happened? An accident to Monsieur? Ah! *Coquin de sort!* He became sympathetic. If only she had received the news earlier, in time for her to take the *rapide.* Nothing but the six o'clock. No *wagon-lit, lit-salon* or restaurant car. A tedious and comfortless journey.

"The comfort—*je m'en fiche.* But the slowness. It will drive me mad— Ah, *mon Dieu,* what can we do?"

Her French blood spoke familiarly to the French servant as her English blood would have spoken to no servant in England. She forgot England. She was in her native France, frantic to reach her French lover in God knew what extremity. A wild idea seized her.

"Look, Lucien. How far is it from here to Paris?"

He shrugged. "About nine hundred kilometres."

"Starting now—could we reach Paris by noon tomorrow?" She suddenly remembered that it was a hireling car and before the amazing proposition dawned on his mind, she went on, recklessly: "I'll pay you ten

thousand francs to get me to Paris before noon. For any accidents to the automobile I am responsible. I'll sign a paper."

Lucien was as young as the war has allowed those who have gone through it to be. His countrywoman was adorable. The romance of her lonely waiting for the bridegroom had caught his fancy. Her tragic despair reacted on his Southern blood. And it was an adventure. The first since his hundred kilometre an hour dashes under shell-fire at the front. As a childless widower, for his life he cared naught; but he could tell all chauffeuring Grasse how he had beaten the record to Paris. He also was an honest man.

"Five thousand francs is what we ask to go from here to Paris and return empty. Mademoiselle can give what *pourboire* is her good pleasure. For reparations, the word of Mademoiselle is a guarantee. A little quarter of an hour? You will be ready? By mid-day we shall be in Paris— Oh, I know the road—every *tournant,* every *caniveau,* every *passage à niveau.* Oh, have no fear. This car it knows me. Paris. Midi. *Heure militaire. Foi de Lucien Gasparoux!*"

And thus began her wild race through France, beginning in the mellow afternoon—a race in which she was insensible to outer things; consumed for the one craving for speed, more speed. . . . Lucien was crawling round corners on a traffickless road. Grasse, Castellane Digne, Sisteron, whirling wickedly along the Alpine road, skirting precipices by an inch or two, the Klaxon horn screeching demoniacally. It was a light open touring car—the pride of the man's heart, his sole means of livelihood

—sound all through, from carburetor to springs, and under his touch as sensitive as a racing horse to the hands of a great jockey.

She took no heed of the purple fruitage of the valleys below, or of the sunset glories over the mountain peaks. Faster, faster, ever faster. But *dites-donc,* Lucien—she would lean forward from the back seat—why not faster? You see there is no danger. And Lucien would throw up a reassuring hand. Darkness fell in the mountains. He lit the lamps. She resented the delay. And she could have cursed him loud and long when he said:

"A quarter of an hour's rest. One must eat something, anyhow. The dinner of Mademoiselle."

He brought the luncheon basket, prepared by the hurried cook, and put it in the little seat in front of her.

"But I don't want to eat. Go on. Eating—*qu'est-ce que cela me fait?*"

"If it doesn't matter to Mademoiselle, it matters much to me, who have to drive all through the night in order to get to Paris by noon."

And having uncorked a bottle of wine, he retired behind the car, and consumed a meal of his own.

At about eleven they reached Grenoble. Five hundred and eighty kilometres to Paris. The great mountains were passed. A rough road to Lyons, through the darkness, nothing visible save the wayside foliage—hoarfrosted by the head lamps. Then the maddening slow down through the tram-racked streets of the vast city, a nightmare of pink faces for ever flashing past in the sudden electric glare. Over the bridge and clattering away on the *pavé.* On to Roanne, Montluçon—three hundred kilometres. The day had dawned long since. No traffic on the road; the car sped at fantastic rate

through the keen air. Now indeed she felt that she was hitched to a comet's tail and whirling through space. Thank heaven she was not in the suffocating, lumbering, unfeeling train. The car was a sentient thing, inspired with her own agony. At Bourges they halted at a little café Lucien knew of under the shadow of the cathedral. Coffee, rolls; swift review of the engine and petrol for the tank. Lucien, haggard from the night's strain, grinned his pride in the car's perfection; also in his own prowess and endurance. Only two hundred kilometres from Paris. Mademoiselle would see that he would keep his word.

Then the straight run north, Gien, Montargis, through the Forest of Fontainebleau, sweet and green in its young May glory. But of this Suzanne saw little, passing from the momentary unconsciousness of exhaustion to the sickening anguish of terror. Accident, accident—the word had rung in her head the whole of the reeling night—what kind of accident? She hated Timothy for his indefiniteness. Why not a few words of accurate detail? He ought to have known her by this time, a modern woman, impatient of the oblique.

As they neared Paris the semi-torpor wore off. The slow movement in the busy forenoon suburban traffic fretted her nerves. Again she cried to Lucien and again he held up his reassuring hand and turned round the smiling pallor of his dark face. She should have no fear. He would arrive.

They dashed through Paris, an unrecognizable medley of streets and buildings and thousands of vehicles and millions of scurrying human beings all flitted before her eyes like a cinematograph reel gone mad.

The car pulled up with a crunch of brakes at the door

of the house in the Avenue Gabriel. Suzanne gave the chauffeur scarcely time to open the door. He pulled his watch from his pocket.

"A quarter past twelve. What was a quarter of an hour? Had he not told Mademoiselle that he would achieve the impossible? Scarcely knowing what she did, she put out both her hands to him and with a *"Merci,* Lucien" rushed into the vestibule. The lift attendant met her. She cried:

"Monsieur Moordius. The accident?"

"Hélas, Mademoiselle——"

She read the tidings in the man's face.

"He is dead?"

The gesture of his hands told her that it was so.

Joseph, stringy, cadaverous, admitted her. She waved a hand to the lift.

"He has told me."

"An awful tragedy, Mademoiselle."

She crossed the statue-filled hall and entered the drawing-room, which he threw open for her.

"Who are here?"

She learned that Timothy had gone to meet the nine o'clock train at the Gare du Lyon—that he did not expect her till the six o'clock. Meanwhile he was out, busying himself with sad arrangements. Valerie was ill in bed. *A crise des nerfs,* said Joseph. The doctor had just gone. A nurse was with her.

Suzanne, white and stricken, said:

"To whom then can I speak?"

"I can tell you everything, Mademoiselle."

He was a man trained to few words. The summary of the facts was brief enough.

Valerie had come home at two o'clock in the morning

and entering her father's library, had found him, as she thought, asleep in an arm-chair beside a cabinet, the drawer of which was open. Across a corner of the drawer was the blotting pad taken from his writing-table, and on the pad, a collection, some twenty, of little feathered darts was arranged in two heaps.

His state was such that she had rung bells and fled into the corridor and screamed, until Joseph, and a maid or two awakened, came rushing down. They entered the room together. Moordius's left shoe and sock had been discarded, and lay a few feet away from the chair. His trouser leg had been pulled half-way up his calf. Foot and ankle were hideously black and swollen. . . .

A Doctor Reynaud, living on the ground floor, was summoned. Also the police. But for what purpose? Moordius was dead. The doctor found a tiny wound, a prick, a nothing at all, in the instep, and away over in a corner of the room, the police picked up one of the little feathered darts.

"That's all that we know, Mademoiselle," said Joseph.

CHAPTER XXII

TO Timothy helpless amid the welter of tragedy and ruin, it seemed as if chaos had come again; and over the face of the desolation brooded the malignant spirit of old Joe Grabbiter, triumphant, yet not satiated with vengeance. He shuddered at the thought of the horrible intensity of that little soul; its implacable hatred; its devilish cunning which, although here and there over-reaching itself childishly, had brought about the foreseen catastrophe. Only in two respects had his revenge been incomplete; and Timothy, the weak, figure-mongering fool, had foiled him. He had discovered the letters. He had saved Suzanne more than half the money which the old man had meant to be devoured by his predatory foe. All through the silent years Grabbiter had read Moordius like an open book, knew his vices, his wild extravagance, his rapacity. Suzanne who had flouted him, telling him to go to the devil, still retained a fortune. But she wandered around the world like a ghost, with the heritage of hate in her heart. The disinherited child that killed the woman he loved lay ill almost to death. Moordius was dead. Moordius & Co. had stopped payment. Tragedy and ruin everywhere: more than enough to make the malignant spirit gloat over its work. So, at any rate, it seemed to Timothy.

Crash universal followed the death of Moordius. And the death itself? Mystery of mysteries. There was the drear ghastliness of the enquiry. The two heaps of

darts on the blotting-pad were given to the official analyst who declared that one heap were poison-tipped, the other harmless. There was no question of murderous attack. But yet the movements of Timothy and Valerie must be explained. Timothy had left the house at eight. Moordius had dined. Whilst he was dining, Valerie, so the servants deposed, had left the flat. At ten o'clock Moordius in his library, had dismissed Joseph for the night. Valerie had aroused the household at past two in the morning. Evidence from the Hotel Continental proved her presence there with Timothy from nine to two. Desperately ill, with nurses day and night, Valerie could not be called as witness. She knew nothing of the police questionings. Timothy had to give formal evidence. But he said nothing about the grotesque adventure with the dart and nothing of the gnome-like threat contained in the last words which he had heard Moordius speak.

Death by misadventure. What else could be the finding?

None but Timothy held the clue to the strange occupation; and that he kept hidden. Yet, after all, what had prompted it? Merely a desire to put into safe order an armoury which had become dangerous? Or was it to make certain that the next dart wherewith he would stab him should be deadly? The suspicion goaded him, in spite of the avalanche of troubles that had descended on his head.

Again, was Moordius's death accidental or designed? If accidental through the dropping of a poisoned dart into his ankle, surely instinct would have made him rise from his chair, ring a bell, cry out, even though he knew the wound was mortal. But no. He remained in the

chair, only removing dart and baring his foot, until death clutched his heart. If intentional, why the baring of the foot and the plucking out of the dart? Paris, at any rate, shrugged its shoulders at the verdict, and whispered suicide, and Timothy heard the whispers. It was the obvious solution for a man faced with ruin. It was in Moordius's character, gambler to the last moment, always *beau joueur*. To Timothy, as to Valerie when she recovered later from her nervous prostration, it was for ever a mystery. After all, what did it matter? The man was dead.

In the midst of the chaos, until a day or so after the funeral, Suzanne passed shadowy, a pale ghost, about the rooms. She was ever so little scornful of Valerie's weak nerves. She who had loved him and would always love him and whose young life, as she verily believed, was ended, kept her balance and clear brain; the other who had hated him gave way to the shock, like a hysterical fool.

"I have no patience with her," she said.

"You should have," said Timothy. "She was a woman sorely tried." And how far, even Timothy at that time was a million miles from imagining.

But Suzanne flashed out: "I can't talk to you, Timothy, if you believe her mad stories. I know what he was, his patience, his indulgence, his generosity. I'll defend his memory before all the world."

"I'm afraid, my dear," he replied very gently, "you'll need all your strength and faith, because the world thinks itself justified in saying very dreadful things about him."

She did not care. "You remarked a long time ago, when I told you about my uncle, that I had some courage.

I answered: 'Lots.' And I have the courage still and the strength and the faith. Lots."

The time came for a business understanding between them. He was now her sole trustee. Hitherto, Moordius had, legally, or illegally, ridden rough-shod over the will and had financed her, she giving him bills of two or three years. Now that was all over. Penniless Timothy could make no advances to a young woman accustomed since her uncle's death to all the luxuries of the earth. His fees under the will had been mortgaged and were swallowed up in the earthquake of Moordius & Co.

"There again," said he, tormented, "it was Moordius. I can't go a step without seeming to reproach him. If only I could spare you pain, my dear!"

"A little more or less doesn't matter. There comes a point when one can't feel more. Say what you like. On the other hand, I must say what I like. And I don't want to pain you or reproach you. But we must be frank. If you had in the first place agreed to his proposals, can't you see that nothing of this would have happened?"

"I can't see," said Timothy, with deeper lining than ever on his brow. "The accident would have occurred just the same."

"It wouldn't. The whole chain of circumstances would have been different." She was coldly logical. "The bank would have tided over its difficulties. You wouldn't have been summoned over to Paris. You wouldn't have destroyed his last hope at the last moment. He wouldn't have sought distraction from worries in the mechanical task of sorting his collection of darts—and there would have been no accident."

"If that's the way you look at it," said he hopelessly.

"I do and I always shall."

"But don't you see that I was right?" he cried at last, in despair. "Even if he had put the money into Moordius & Co., it would have only tided over things for a month or two. It would all have gone like your Midland Citizens' shares. The failure is colossal."

She put aside his arguments. Frankly, she did not believe him. Moordius had too acute a financial brain to court ruin, when he knew that by marrying her he would be the disposer of an ample fortune. Besides, what man in his senses would reduce the woman he loved to poverty?

Timothy groaned. Since his talk with Valerie, on that tragic night, he had more than suspected Moordius's motives. Marriage with Suzanne was a last resource. Master of enormous sums, could he not have fled from the inevitable disgrace to a safer land? But what was the good of using question with a fanatical woman?

"One never knows what a born gambler will do," he said.

Again she turned on him. "You think he was actually capable of sacrificing me, stupidly, callously, unscrupulously?"

"My dear," said he, with a touch on her wrist—they were standing in the embrasure of the great dining-room —"I've enough to bear already. Don't make things harder for me. Moordius is dead. You keep your illusions—your impressions. But I must keep mine."

"And I want to know what those are?" She stamped her foot. "It must be war or peace between us for ever more. Tell me like a man—if you are a man—exactly what you think of Moordius."

Timothy flushed brick-red at the insult. He stood for an instant transfigured by the rare wave of passion that sweeps through the insignificant being.

"I think he was one of the vilest scoundrels that God ever allowed to crawl on this earth."

She received the blow, white and defiant.

"You lie!"

"I can give you proofs. My God, Suzanne! Do you think I'd say such a thing if I didn't know?"

"You know nothing but lies," she said. "All your proofs are lies. You could give me ten thousand and I wouldn't believe one of them."

"Why did you ask me what I thought of Moordius?"

"To know exactly where we stand." She paused for a few moments. Then: "If you thought him such a fiend in human shape, why didn't you have the courage to tell me? Why allow me to marry him?"

"That night," said Timothy, "Valerie, as you know, was with me till two o'clock in the morning. When she left me I had made up my mind to go down to Frélon and tell you everything I knew. God took the matter out of my hands."

She smiled derisively. "For which you most devoutly thanked Him. Anyhow He spared you a fool's errand. Do you think I would have believed then, any more than I believe now?"

After a while she said: "We began by discussing business—we had better finish with it. The position is very clear, as far as I am concerned. I refuse to live with you—everything has made that impossible. You will give me the stipulated sum under the will—three hundred and sixty-five pounds a year, until I am twenty-five, and let me go my way."

"Which way is that—on such a pittance?" asked Timothy.

"It will be more than enough for me, at Dreuil."

"Dreuil?"

"Yes. To my old Aunt Germaine. My own people. I don't see how I can be of much worry to you. Good-bye."

"Then you are going out of my life altogether?" he asked.

She looked at him stonily, for her heart was very bitter against him.

"I hope so," said she, and walked out of the room.

During the months that followed, Timothy passed through a purgatory of shame and despair. The crash of Moordius & Co., monstrous in its detonation, reverberated its scandal and its misery all through France. That the brain of a man could have kept the involved concern together for the past two or three years seemed beyond possibility. The liabilities were enormous. Moordius's personal indebtedness, a large fortune. The château at Frélon was seized and offered for sale; the furniture of the apartment in the Avenue Gabriel were put up for auction and the patient collection of three generations of men was dispersed to the four quarters of the globe. Paris was convulsed by the shock, and the name of the dead man was as the mud in the Paris streets. And the crash re-echoed in London, bringing Timothy down. For the mortgaged honoraria under the will formed part of the assets, such as they were, of Moordius & Co., and an action was brought in the English courts; and, Timothy filed his appeal in bankruptcy; and the words of reprimand addressed to him in open court and

printed in newspapers seared his soul; and as mud in the London streets was the name of Timothy. And the horde of minor creditors, tradespeople with their current bills, which he could not meet, put in their claims.

Russet-cheeked Angela Messiter, paid before the proceedings out of his modest bank balance, vanished into the mists of her profession. Naomi and Phoebe were packed off to the Devonshire Rectory where the flitting of a full-grown nestling or two had left beds vacant.

Mrs. Barton had come herself to fetch the children, and had shed all that her kind heart could of comfort over her brother. But, when he came back from Paddington Station and entered his desolate house, he broke down and sobbed in the solitude of his ramshackle study.

The beloved house had to go too. A penniless bankrupt could not live in Montpellier Square. Essential furniture he stored; for the eternal hope if it did not spring, at least leaked in Timothy's despairing breast the moisture, let us say, of hope that one day, in the dim future, he might again make a home for himself. But the superfluous he sold; including his set of bound volumes of Bell's "Life in London," as precious to him as the exquisite Sèvres box was to Moordius. And when, on a final survey of the dismantled place, he entered the russet and green and vermilion room dedicated to Suzanne, his heart was wrung with peculiar anguish.

Assets all but *nil,* Timothy stood almost penniless. Bankrupt, he ceased automatically to be a member of his two clubs. He took a little furnished bedroom in the King's Road, and spent most of his time in the Chelsea Public Library, answering advertisements in the newspapers. And left, awfully, to himself, he became dingy and shabby and grew a straggly beard—and wandered

along the Thames Embankment at night like a lost, lame dog.

Not least of all the incomprehensible factors of his bewildered life was Valerie. At their last meeting, she had abandoned herself in his arms, and he, with a newly awakened love for her, had asked her to marry him. The thrill of that embrace was unforgettable. Their troth—to Timothy's direct soul—was eternally plighted. And though the subsequent talk was not that of lovers, yet at the very last moment of that last interview, she had thrown her arms round his neck and kissed him. Through the outer darkness that enveloped him shone this new and consoling love. Suzanne had gone, had changed, had spurned him, trodden him under foot, proclaiming in her young truculence, Moordius a fallen and sinless Lucifer. The devoutest of lovers cannot remain faithful to a mistress so remote and antagonistic. He put her down as a wonder and a desire once wild, but now almost unaccountably tame in his life. But always as a wonder—so far was he loyal—beyond those warm human imaginings satisfied by the yearning eyes and the soft straining bosom of the other woman whom he knew to be the true mistress and the true wife and the true mother of his child and of children to come.

And since that swift embrace outside the Hotel Continental, he had not seen her.

Of course, she had been desperately ill. In Paris her door had been closed. She had been removed to a nursing home, whence she issued long after his departure from Paris. During her stay he had written repeatedly; received at last a communication from the head of the establishment, requesting him to cease writing for the present, as the patient was not permitted to receive any

correspondence. Her life was at stake. Rest was essential, and, as far as possible, oblivion of the outside world.

Her financial position added to his worries. Moordius had died intestate; but even had he bequeathed her his all, she could have received nothing from a bankrupt estate. She had left the house with her personal possessions; her wardrobe, her jewellery, a few objects of art; and she may have had a few thousand francs to the credit of her current banking account. Beyond that, like himself, she was penniless.

At last, in some measure, she relieved this grossest of his anxieties, when, able to take up the thread of life again, she was allowed to write.

"Dearest Timothy,

"I have been at death's door all this long time, but now I am getting strong and can face things. Bless you for all your letters, which I have just read. You need not be troubled about me any more. I have enough ready money to carry me on for at least a couple of years. You don't tell me how you yourself are situated; but if, as I guess, your fight is hard, it would bring a little peace to my heart to share with you what I have. For I'm not at peace, Timothy—and never shall be. Why, I dare not tell you—and you must never ask.

"When I said I would marry you, dear, I meant it, no matter what sickness or poverty or disgrace. But when I left you I had put it out of my mind for ever. And now that I've awakened to a new world, I find it's beyond all possibility that I could be your wife.

"Be kind to me, Timothy, and never refer to this matter again. Don't think I'm capricious or mercenary, for indeed I love you with all my aching soul.

"Embrace the beloved little ones for me.

"Yours,

"Valerie."

Of the significance of this, his honest mind could form no notion beyond a couple of conjectures. Did she mean

that the shock of meeting the dead man had quickened life-long remorse for the deadly hatred in which she had held him? Or, possibly, did she feel her fineness defiled by the knowledge of the illegitimacy of her birth? In either case her spiritual attitude appeared super-sensitive, even to a sensitive Timothy. He wrote protesting. He loved her, as she knew well. Let him struggle out of his present morass and he would claim her for himself and for Naomi. He dismissed, as having no weight with him, the considerations which had led to her decision. He absolved her, with ingenuous scorn, from caprice or sordidness. His belief in her love was as deep as his belief in God. And when he had held her in his arms that night, he had consecrated himself to her everlastingly.

She answered vaguely, lovingly reiterating the sentiments of her former letter. He replied. No answer. A fortnight afterwards his letter was returned to him through the Post Office.

Yet now and then he received from her little letters of love, of consolation. She had read the horrors in the newspapers. He must be brave. He must be the indomitable captain of his soul. And her great love, night and day, was for ever enfolding him. But the letters bore no address. Post marks at first indicated Paris, then Brussels. Then Paris again.

To Timothy, answering advertisements in the newspapers, in the King's Road bedroom, she was eternally and unaccountably lost.

Timothy answered advertisements; but to no avail. Who would employ a man whose name was as mud in the London streets? A few friends, among them Murga-

troyd of the Money Market, Augustus Combermere, even Jevons of the Midland Citizens' Bank had written sympathetically, mingling the I-told-you-so with the vague anything-I-can-do-for-you formula of polite reservation of intention. When Timothy had borrowed five pounds from his brother-in-law, so as to pay his rent and live for a few days, he interviewed Jevons. But only then. To confess himself to a comparative stranger was easier than to a friend. Jevons turned him down in the most courteously icy way in the world. He went out dragging never so lame a leg.

It was winter. He limped from the City to Chelsea through melting slush and mounted to his fireless room in the King's Road, and tried to gain what warmth he could from Naomi's happy egotistic letter. She had been riding on a Dartmoor pony who was a tremendous darling. Uncle had given the family two guinea pigs, whom they had called Gertrude and Thomas and Thomas had produced a lot of weeny, weeny little guinea pigs as big as mice which were tremendous darlings, and Phoebe had fallen down and knocked the skin off her nose; and, "with love to darling Daddy, from Naomi." The last sheet bore innumerable crosses, representing kisses, a house with a prodigious amount of smoke issuing from the chimney and a conventional cat.

Timothy's mind went back to her childish adorableness and to a woman's mothering arms adorably around her. And he threw himself on his bed and wept.

The next day saw him meekly enquiring of the commissionaire in the downstairs office of Messrs. Combermere, Son & Combermere, whether he could speak to Mr. Augustus. The telephone reply was satisfactory.

"Will you go up, sir."

Timothy mounted the familiar stairs and tapped at Augustus's door, not daring to use his old right of entry without announcement. At the cheery "Come in," he entered the comfortable room. Augustus fluttered up to him, wrung him by the hand. Dear old Timothy! So glad to see him. Why hadn't he looked him up before? He had written what he felt about the beastly business. Well, he hoped he was on his legs again.

He established him in the visitors' chair, gave him a cigar, put his hands on his shoulders and scanned the miserable, care-lined face. At the touch and the kindness in the shrivelled young face, it suddenly occurred to Timothy that here was a sincere affection on which he had never counted.

"You're looking ill. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"I've been through a devil of a time," said Timothy.

"I know. But it's over now. Hundreds of good men go through the Bankruptcy Court, through no fault of their own. And they manage to get out of it somehow."

"I never shall," said Timothy. "I'm down and out."

"What do you mean? Tell me."

He jogged the story out of a reluctant Timothy. Then he stood before him, like the quivering Autumn Leaf that he was.

"You silly, silly ass. Why didn't you tell me before? How was I to know? In your reply to my letter you never gave me a hint. Good God!" He blew round. "Answering advertisements! But man alive! don't you realize that you've got friends? Do you suppose you can associate intimately with human beings, even with

such a rum and rotten crowd like ourselves, without making them fond of you. Damn it—love you?"

"I didn't know," said Timothy, with a little crack in his voice.

Augustus rated him. "Then you damn well ought to. Chartered accountants don't go about twangling mandolins and serenading each other with love songs. But they have human feelings." His, for the moment, choked his utterance. He flickered his thin brown hands. "Oh, you silly ass!"

"I suppose I am," said Timothy, with his head in his hands. "That's why I didn't know. I'm such a dull chap that when any one says—well—what you've been saying now, it knocks me all of a heap."

He passed his hand over his eyes, rose and groped for his hat and held out his hand. He stammered out a few words.

"I'll never forget your goodness, Augustus. I thought I was friendless, all alone. You've made a new man of me."

The Autumn Leaf looked at him perplexed. "But what the deuce are you going for?"

"I don't know," said Timothy, "but——"

"But what did you come for?"

"We'll talk about it another day," said Timothy, his heart full.

Augustus pushed him, with airy objurgations into a chair.

"To put it brutally, you came to ask if I could find you a job."

Timothy shrank and murmured protest. What had passed between them had uplifted him to a spiritual plane on which he must rest awhile for complete realiza-

tion. The children loved him: that perhaps was the way of Nature. A woman loved him: that, though incomprehensible, might be the way of sex. But that a man—and a man whom he had always regarded as a pleasant and emotionless worldling should love him was a revelation and a wonder that eclipsed all other earthly things. Asking for a job? The sordid profanity of it! All his sensitive soul urged him away. He made a motion to rise, but the other, with a gentle touch, kept him in his chair and looked down on him with his withered smile.

"I have a job here for you right now—if it's worth your while to accept it. What would you say to rejoining us? Not as a partner, unfortunately—for obvious reasons. But old Greening has retired, thank heaven, on a pension—you know the disastrous dodderer he was—and we're casting round for a managing clerk. Of course, Timothy, old chap," he went on hurriedly, so as to get over any wounding of susceptibilities at the quickest possible speed, "we'll be able to give you a bit more than he got—that goes without saying—and you'll have your old room and we'll camouflage things to the staff so that they'll think you're a partner and you'll have, as far as possible, your old position and authority. As I say, if it's worth your while, dear old man—it's only a salary you know—but it may tide you over a year or two, until something else turns up, and you'll be a godsend to us. What about it?"

Timothy sat, staring in front of him, his fists at his temples, his dark brow like corrugated iron.

"God is very good to me," he said. Then, it dawning upon his amazedness that this expression of his heart's gratitude was not sufficiently personal, he added foolishly: "But you are better, Augustus."

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was a sultry day in late July. Timothy sat in his old sunless room at the end of a long passage on the ground floor; but managing clerk where once he had been partner, and, as managing clerk, liable to be summoned at any moment to the presence of any member of the firm who had need of his services. At first it had been strange to be at beck and call; but universal kindness in the house blunted the edge of humiliation. After some months it seemed the avocation to which he had been born. His work was definite, intelligible, easily accomplished. The days when he reigned, a duped and confused god, in Kingsway, were blurred like the details of a half-remembered dream.

Work was slack. Every one who could was panting out of London. In another few weeks he could pant out too, to Devonshire, to the little brown-eyed elf whom he had not seen since Christmas, when his sister had made him up a bed in the Rectory drawing-room. His heart ached for Naomi.

Yet verily, God and Augustus had been good to him, he reflected. Also, lots of other people; and Fate. One of the mortgaged years' income for the Suzanne Chastel estate, automatically paid, had enabled the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy to declare a substantial payment of a considerable number of shillings in the pound. If Suzanne remained unmarried, the day of his discharge would come within reasonable time. Meanwhile he lived closely, according to a standard of values far less than the original derided by Moordius. It ranked even below

that of the "George and Vulture." Succulent chops cost money—even in so unpretentious a hostelry. He would plunge into a clattering bar, where the economical and impecunious clustered on high stools, and feed himself on cold meat and bread and lots of mustard and of water, which were free. He breakfasted, slept and dined—by one of God's especial mercies to Timothy, he had never really learned to dine—in an untidy boarding-house in Torrington Square, Bloomsbury, which called itself a Residential Hotel. Sometimes in his leisure hours there he played billiards, on an untrue table, with a young Japanese gentleman, a student at University College; and sometimes picquet with an old lady who appeared to have been on intimate terms with Queen Victoria. It was an existence devoid of gaiety; but it fulfilled his modest personal claims. . . . He found his bank balance ever increasing tinily which, with the future in view, was a great comfort.

A more vital change in his existence arose from a re-establishment of touch with Valerie. Shortly after he had rejoined Combermere, Son & Combermere, he had received a letter from her giving her address at a Paris Post Restante. She had tried to be brave, she said, and cut herself out of his life; but her heart was breaking; she must have news of him or die—and she was afraid to die. Materially, she was faring well. She had not yet exhausted her ready money and there were always her jewels for the future. Meanwhile she had found financial advantage and distraction of mind in giving English lessons to a friend's children. He need not worry about her position. But no longer could she bear the silence between them that she herself had ordained. And Timothy, writing in the mouldy little bed-sitting-

room of the Residential Hotel, had poured out all his life to her, for the first time, perhaps, able to put into words the story of his sufferings and to lay bare to another the secret places of his soul. She had replied, stricken with remorse; she poured over him all the balm of her love, in a woman's passionate desire to heal the hurt of the loss of Naomi and his home and all that made life sweet to him. To Timothy she seemed to have undergone another transformation. She wrote like a woman standing on higher ground, with a new and almost serene knowledge of human sorrows, and with a new and inspired sympathy. Her love for him vibrated in every line; but it was a love purified, almost divine, shining clear through unutterable sadness.

So the correspondence continued, intimate and solacing, helping the lame dog Timothy over many a stile. It brought queer beauty into his lonely life. It was like a warm interchange of thought with a dream-woman living among the stars.

She had forbidden him to question her irrevocable decision that their marriage was impossible. She returned to the ban, when now and then he pleaded for reconsideration. The barrier she had raised between them, whatever it might be, would surely be worn away by the processes of Time. She replied that the barrier was a rock which Time could not wear away. Far better that they should cease writing and that he should hold her just as a memory of the love of woman, than that he should entertain false hopes. Should he never see her again? he asked. No. That was why she had given him no other address than the Poste Restante.

"For the present, my dear," she wrote, "I feel that this means of communication between our hearts is of

comfort to you, as God knows it is to me. So as long as it brings some comfort to you, let it last. And when Time, which can't wear away the rock we spoke of, wears away your need of me, it will be so gradual that neither of us will feel it."

To which he replied in effect, that his need of her would grow day by day more and more perdurable and its Eternity would defy Time. The few words of her answer suggested a smile sorrowful with the wisdom of the world.

The correspondence evoked in Timothy a subjective life new to his simple experience of earthly phenomena. Through routine of office, meals at the boarding-house, gaming with the young Japanese or the old lady who was intimate with Queen Victoria; behind his longings for Naomi, his anticipation of summer holiday with the child of his adoration; deep down hidden in his consciousness, ran the current of this spiritual union. He submitted to the influence which she at last had succeeded in exercising. Corporeally she had withdrawn herself beyond his sphere; and so, as the months went on, she became to him less a body than a soul with which his own communed freely. Almost had he ceased from puzzling over the deep motives actuating this withdrawal. He knew they were valid and loyal, rooted in tragedy. His mind working over the drama of a year ago had gradually arrived at somewhere near the truth; but so gradually that at last, when he had completed his journey, it had lost the terror of a sudden revelation. He could not picture any scene; nor did he try; that was not the way of his mental processes. The Truth dawned on him vaguely, filling him with a sense of the lofty inevitableness of Greek Tragedy, of the white fate-driven avenger,

doomed to sacrifice; and also with a reassuring trust in the infinite mercy of God. Then it was a new Timothy, at last, who, when he took pen in hand, found expression for thoughts that had hitherto existed as nebulous unrelated sensations at the back of his mind. And in this way, he too, brought consolation to the soul of a woman trying to work out her salvation.

He sat back in his old office chair, this late July afternoon, lost in his dreams. It was twenty minutes to five. Work was finished for the day. If he chose he could put on his hat and go out. But conscientious Timothy must set an example to the staff. At five o'clock and not before could the office be shut. Twenty minutes therefore of idleness and the procession of anxieties, longings and thanksgivings.

The telephone bell aroused him with a start. The commissionaire's voice.

"A lady to see you, sir. Not business. A private matter. Rather not give her name. Says you'll know."

Timothy's heart thumped against his ribs. He remained so long with the receiver in his hand that the commissionaire spoke again. Timothy, with a dry throat, gave the order.

"Yes. Show her up."

She had come. She had come to him at last. It never occurred to him to question it. He rose from his chair, steadying himself with his knuckles on the table. She had lifted the ban. She had come as woman. And within him grew suddenly a fierce hunger for her. The seconds lengthened themselves into interminable minutes. The delay seemed endless. Had she repented suddenly and gone away? He crossed the room and threw open the door and found himself face to face with Suzanne.

He recoiled and wiped a wet brow with his hand.

"You? Suzanne?"

She followed him into the room. The office boy who had guided her, shut the door.

"Who did you think it was?"

"I didn't know—I never thought—forgive me," he stammered, struggling to recover from the shock of his vast disappointment. Nervously he set a chair.

"You have cut yourself adrift from me, you see, for so long that I never dreamed it could be you."

Then he saw that she was holding out her hand.

"Won't you even shake hands with me?" she asked in her old, nonchalant way and with her ironical smile.

She was no longer in mourning as he had last seen her in Paris, over a year ago; but in a lilac muslin dress and a white felt hat. In the dim dusty room she looked very young and fresh. She took the offered chair. Timothy groped mechanically for another, till realizing there wasn't one, retreated to his own behind the desk.

"I suppose you want to know what I've come for?"

"I'm your trustee and guardian," said Timothy, "so——"

"I've come to say I've been a beast," said Suzanne.

Taken aback by her frankness he could only make a protesting gesture.

"No, no, my dear——"

"Yes, yes. I've behaved abominably. I want to ask your forgiveness."

Said he, out of the gentleness of his heart: "There's nothing to forgive. We parted on a definite understanding. You had your convictions, which I couldn't but respect; I had mine, which I couldn't change. I quite

recognized that outside mere business, which lawyers have seen to, our relations were impossible."

With one of her characteristic little half laughs: "And you haven't cared a hang what happened to me ever since." At the look of pain on his face, she rose swiftly and thrust out her two gloved hands across the table. "No, no. I didn't mean it. Why will you always be so literal?" She wrung his hands and sat down again. "Of course I know you've cared. It's I that didn't. I hated you, Timothy. I hated you for months and months."

"And now?"

"I've come more or less to my senses."

"What has happened?" he asked, with a quickening of interest.

"A year of Dreuil. The God-forsaken, God-forgotten, yet God-inspired little cathedral town of Dreuil. If you want to see your inmost self stark-born mother naked, spend a year at Dreuil. Except coddling your immortal soul, there's nothing else to do. Have you ever lived in a little petty, bigoted town under the shadow of a great Gothic cathedral?"

Timothy shook his head. "Never lived, of course. But I've stood in the meadows of Salisbury—and Ely, too, when I was at Cambridge. I think I can understand. You feel your littleness and yet you feel there's something in you that isn't little. You go away feeling cleansed of all sorts of littleness——" He passed his hand through his shaggy brown hair. "I wish to goodness I could express what I mean."

"You've hit the word," she said. "Cleansed. If it hadn't been for the cathedral I should have gone mad.

As it was, I thought seriously for a time of going into a convent. Then I pulled myself together. I had a great shock, Timothy."

"I know, my dear," said he.

"I ought to have faced it better. I see now that to run away and bury oneself was not the bravest thing to do. But I want you to believe I was loyal according to my lights. I made up my mind that nothing should shake my faith in Moordius. For months I never looked at a newspaper or opened a letter from friends—and I forbade my Aunt Germaine to speak of him. I lived in deliberate ignorance. What the world said about him, even now I don't know, and I don't want to know. I keep him as he was to me. Can you understand?"

"Quite," said Timothy. "I fully understand." There was a short pause. Then he said: "I don't know how to put it to you—it's rather delicate—but is it your present intention to remain, as they say, faithful to his memory and never marry?"

"The two things are different. I shall never think evil of him. To me as a girl he was a figure of great wonder and beauty. In that way I'm going to be loyal to my memory. Whether I loved him in the ordinary way of love I don't know. I don't think I did. Oh, I had all that out with myself under the cathedral. And now I've come back into the world without the smallest desire to *coiffer Sainte Cathérine*"—she smiled at his look of enquiry—"which means to surrender oneself to a life of spinsterhood—not if I can help it."

"I'm glad," said Timothy, pulling out his pipe. "You're young. You'll soon come into your fortune. The world is full of love waiting to be—well—to be

garnered. Real love—a very beautiful thing, Suzanne."

She drew off her gloves and threw them on the table. "It's so hot." Then, with her defiant uplift of chin: "How can you be so sweet and gentle to me when I've treated you in this revolting way? What you must have thought of me while you were going through hell and never hearing a kind word from me?"

"I thought, my dear, you had enough suffering of your own to bear—suffering in which, from the nature of things, it was impossible for me to help you."

"But I could have helped you in yours. What it has been I've only learned lately. But I might have guessed. Any fool could have guessed. Instead of which I refused to hear of anything outside myself. And I went on hating you—until——"

"Until when?"

"Until, as you said, I was cleansed. It took months. I knew I had been unjust. I knew that you couldn't possibly lie; that all you told me about the failing of the bank was true; that you were fighting for me all the time; that if it hadn't been for me, you would have been as happy as you were when I first came to your house. And I didn't write to you, because I was ashamed. But I didn't know—how could I?—what I know now—what it all meant to you—poverty—the break up of your home—parting with Naomi—I didn't, Timothy. Upon my soul I didn't." She stood before him, her lips quivering and, to his amazement, her eyes full of tears. "That's why I've come to you now—to ask your forgiveness—to ask you to give me back some of the love you once had for me. I want to make you any reparation in the world you can ask of me."

Timothy, with mingled emotions of gladness and dis-

tress, limped round to her. She swerved to him and buried her face on his shoulder.

"I'm a fool. I haven't cried for years. I never thought I should be frightened at being alone—but I am. I've been taking shadows for substances so long, that now I've got a substance—— Oh, Timothy, dear," she raised her head and withdrew ever so little from his instinctively protecting arm, "What must you think of me?"

And Timothy said in his confused way: "My dear, that's all right. Don't worry. You don't know how lovely it is to be friends again."

She broke apart, suddenly, and dabbed the tears from her eyes and confronted him with her old air of the young Diana.

"I said I'd make any reparation in the world. I meant it. Once you said you loved me. I know you did, for you're not a man who says things that aren't true. But in so many words you didn't ask me to marry you."

"No," said Timothy. "How could I?"

"Well, suppose I said I am ready to marry you now?"

Said he: "My dear Suzanne, are you serious?"

"Never more serious in my life. I know what you are. Pure gold."

Timothy took up her gloves, mechanically straightened them, and went back, as if for safety, to his chair behind the table. Once, such words would have opened wide the heavens to him and disclosed to his senses divine beauties and celestial harmonies. But now they awakened in him only a pitiful disturbance. He had loved her; but in the foolish, adoring and hopeless way of the boy who raises his eyes to the radiant lady for ever beyond his reach. The revelation of love which comes to a boy seventeen had come to Timothy only in his middle-

thirties. His development had proceeded much on the same lines. He beheld her, still the same Suzanne, fair to look on, characterful, independent, loyal, proud, retaining all the old qualities and combining with them an added charm of softness; yet, the glamour surrounding her had faded. All that he had felt towards her, all of her that he had desired was as nothing to the new and permanent spiritual union with another which had given meaning to his lonely life.

She stood bending over him, her hands on the table, waiting for him to speak. At last the little ironic smile hovered round her lips.

"Well. You won't have me, Timothy? I can't do more, can I?"

He raised distressed eyes. "No, my dear. You can't do more."

"Then your answer is no," she said smiling on him.

"It must be, Suzanne. So many things have happened since those days—they seem so far away. You're always wonderful. Your generosity now makes you more wonderful than ever. But——" He buried his head on hands, elbows on table.

Suzanne laughed and laid her fingers for a caressing moment on his rough brown hair.

"Dear old Timothy," she said and calmly resumed her seat. "Don't think I'm hurt. I'm not. If you had agreed I should have been the most astounded woman in the world."

He lifted his head in surprise. "But if I had agreed, would you have married me, all the same?"

"Oh, certainly. I stick to my bargains. I think I should have been happy trying to re-transform you. And there would have been Naomi and—all sorts of

things. But I don't think you would have been happy."

"I'm happier in getting back your friendship and affection," said he. He had recovered his balance, though why she had made the proposal, save for a royal impulse to make amends for imaginary wrong, he had but a confused notion. "We've, all of us, passed through very strange experiences, during the last year or so, and they've left their mark. We're, none of us, the same. Sometimes I think it has been for our ultimate good. Belief in the Divine ordering of things was beaten into me as a child. Sometimes my Faith has burned very low—at other times, especially during the last months, it has flamed high." He broke off suddenly. "I don't know why I'm talking like this to you, Suzanne."

"I do. Because I know that all you've said is true. We've all changed. I've changed—thanks to Dreuil and the *bon Dieu* working through the cathedral. And so have you. You found my proposal of marriage preposterous, because you stand, for the first time in your life—— Oh! Timothy, I don't mean to be impertinent—but we're talking real things, aren't we? You're standing for the first time in your life on firm ground. I know. And Valerie——"

"Valerie?" cried Timothy. "What have you to do with Valerie?"

"Didn't you say 'all of us'? If you had meant only you and me, it would have been 'both of us.' Oh, yes, my dear Timothy, I've very much to do with Valerie. Everything to do with Valerie. That's why I'm here at this hour. By the way——" She looked at the dilapidated leaden-weighted old Dutch clock, whose naked pendulum click-clacked in the silence of the musty and

sunless room remote from the roar of the city streets—"I'm keeping you too long. They may want to shut up the office."

He reassured her. He was alone. Every one had gone long ago, except the commissionaire, who lived on the premises. His time was hers. Now, about Valerie? In her letters she had made no mention of Suzanne. He had taken it for granted that the lives of the two women had been sundered irremediably.

"Valerie?" said he, "I don't understand."

"You two love each other, don't you?"

"That is so," Timothy replied gravely. "How do you know?"

"I know that she does. I wasn't sure about you. Now I am."

He said with a smile, "Because just now I resisted temptation?"

"As for that, it was twofold," she said. "I meant to do it in any case. And then I promised. She made it a condition."

"She—when?"

"A few days ago," said Suzanne.

Cried Timothy: "You have seen her? How? How did you find her out?"

"It was very simple," said Suzanne. "A friend, an acquaintance, Mme. de Restal, had written to her. She was anxious about Valerie Doon who was giving lessons to her children. Valerie seemed to be ill and unhappy and friendless; although saying nothing, and refusing to answer the discreetest questions, she had evidently not recovered from the shock of her father's death; she was only bright and gay with the children, who adored her; otherwise she was silent and solitary. Not the *état d'âme*

for a woman so young. She, Madame de Restal, fearing a crisis, had therefore taken the liberty of writing without her knowledge, to the only intimate friend she could think of."

"I started at once for Paris," said Suzanne. "I can't explain why, if you haven't understood. The cathedral again, if you like. And I told you I had changed . . . so I went to Paris and the first thing next morning to Madame de Restal's. Oh, Timothy, she has changed——"

"She never told me she was ill——" groaned Timothy.

"She isn't physically—but she looks like a nun—her dark eyes seem to take up all her face, which is so pale—and there's a strange spirituality about her——" She paused.

"Yes?" said Timothy.

"I'd better begin at the beginning. I spent the whole day with her, in a little room which Madame de Restal let us have to ourselves. She even sent us up food. Not that we ate much of it. At first Valerie couldn't imagine why I had come. No wonder. Looked on me as her enemy—as I was a year ago. Anyhow, I managed to make my peace with her—and eventually she spoke her heart. . . . How that woman loves you, Timothy. . . ."

Her grey eyes held him. It was a new Suzanne, with a new note of tenderness in her voice. An idea began to gather shape in his mind. She was pleading Valerie's cause. Not, as she once did, with ironical carelessness, but with a sincere emotion.

"I know," whispered Timothy.

He sat back with his elbow on the arm of his chair and his chin in his hand. It was strange that even to this new Suzanne, Valerie should have unburdened herself. Uncannily to him, she guessed his thoughts.

"I'm not as hard as I make myself out to be. Besides, I've gone through a gigantic pulping machine. I had Valerie sobbing in my arms. Funny things happen in this world, don't they? In the end I got everything out of her."

"Everything?" asked Timothy.

Their eyes met again for some seconds across the table.

"Much more than you know, Timothy."

"Not very much," said he.

She did not take up the point, but proceeded with her story, and he listened in his grave silence.

"Mind you," said Suzanne, at last, "that tale of systematic cruelty I'm not going to believe. I refused to listen to it. I told you before. I keep my soul's position with regard to him. That he had it in his nature, I was aware long ago. We went to a bull-fight. . . . But no matter. Look, Timothy—here was a man with a child who he knew wasn't his own——"

"How could he have known?" asked Timothy. "I was the only creature in the universe who had the secret."

Suzanne snapped her fingers in her old manner. "My Uncle Grabbiter was inhabited by the devil in the form of an ostrich. Of course Moordius knew. It goes without saying. But he did his best to bring up the alien child as his own daughter and give her that place in the eyes of the world. But how could you have expected him to love her? My dear—don't let us talk of it—all this concerns me and my God and Moordius. Let us get back to Valerie."

"Yes," said Timothy. "Let us get back to Valerie."

Suzanne put her two hands before her eyes and her finger tips ruffled the hair beneath her hat. She drew

them away suddenly and he saw that her face was drawn and that a touch of haggardness marred her eyes. She bent across the table.

"You do love her, Timothy, don't you? Not in the silly way in which you fancied yourself in love with me. But something beyond all that. You would go through hell for her?"

Said Timothy: "I've been doing that for months past and I've found it heaven."

Uncomprehending, she waved her hands in desperation.

"Oh, Timothy, will you never understand? Why do you think she has kept away from you all this year? Why has she put up the eternal barrier between you? Oh, I don't know. The whole thing's impossible. The woman's literally dying of love for you. She has been through hell, if any one has in this world. And she has come out purified, Timothy."

Very gravely he said: "I don't need you, Suzanne, to tell me what Valerie is."

He baffled her. Here was the apparently new Timothy, speaking with an assured air of authority. But yet he was the old Timothy, if not obtuse, at least unpercipient of things beneath the surface. He had not caught the note almost of agony in her questions. He had not even answered them. She had a terrible mission to fulfil. So far from aiding her, he seemed far from divining her unrest. He was aware, she felt, of the spiritually awakened woman that was Valerie; he had undergone her influence; he was a man on a higher plane of being. But through what purgatory Valerie had passed, he gave no sign of comprehending. True he had spoken oracularly when she had said that Valerie had told her everything. But that meant nothing. To herself in Valerie's

awful confidence, the reason for her aloofness was obvious; yet of this Timothy had no notion.

It took some time before she could address herself to the almost impossible task which she had undertaken in her young and generous courage. Her mind went back to the little dark sitting-room in Paris and to the pallid woman with the tragic eyes who had entrusted her with the sole knowledge of the secret thing that had wrecked her life, as far as it could be physically lived. She shivered, again, at the horror of the revelation, all the more poignant by reason of her own passionate and obstinate loyalty to Moordius.

She said with an assumption of her modern bravura: "Give me a little breathing space. I've got something to tell you. You realize, of course, that I'm a kind of self-appointed go-between—Valerie only allowed it—I think I've already said so—on her conditions. The first was silly. To ask you to marry me. Of course, I knew you wouldn't. I had the pleasure of reminding you long ago that Timothys don't grow on every bush. That's all over. But the second condition—I'm to tell you something that she could not tell you herself——"

"It refers," said Timothy, without a change of attitude, "to that night when I saw her for the last time."

She quickened. "Yes."

"I've known it—that's to say I've guessed it for a long time."

Her nerves on edge, she cried: "For God's sake tell me what you've guessed, so that I can spare you any shock."

"She went from me with murder in her heart against Moordius," said Timothy. "I'm a man slow of apprehension of violent passions. But that can be the only

solution of the mystery." He held up a hand ordaining silence. "I've lived through those hours over and over again, since her first letter to me after her illness. It was when I told her she was not Moordius's daughter that the change came. No, my dear, you're not telling me things I don't know."

She rose with a wide gesture.

"Oh, thank God, thank God! I thought I had bitten off something more than I could chew—in coming here. But you know. Yes. She passed by his library door, saw the chink of light. Went to her own rooms and got a little revolver——"

"No, no," cried Timothy, rising.

"Yes, yes." She stood compelling in her vehement youth. "She had bought it for herself, if things grew too impossible for her. She flew down the corridor to have the whole of her life out with him. To kill him, and then herself. She opened the library door——"

"Stop! Stop!"

Timothy shouted loud, and the girl yielded to the imperious command of the man.

"I don't want to hear any more. It's all unimportant. The primary fact is all that matters. She went from me to kill him and by the grace of Almighty God she was saved from the crime. But you—you, Suzanne—didn't you go on your knees to her and prostrate yourself?"

She recoiled in amazement. Not only did she see before her a Timothy livid and trembling with passion, but a Timothy darting at her an accusing finger at the end of a long arm. She gasped out:

"Why should I? What had I to do with it?"

"It was to save you from that damned fiend. The last words she spoke to me—before she got into the

taxi-cab to run home—'I will look after Suzanne.' "

Suzanne, very white, clutched at her breast.

"She didn't tell me that."

"But, by God, I tell you," said Timothy.

There was a long, long silence. Timothy wiped the sweat from his brow. The old grandfather's clock wheezed out an unregarded hour. The light deepened in the mean and sunless office. The girl sat in her chair hiding her face. All her fierce young certainties that, regretfully, she had felt crumbling for months, now came clattering, with the force of an earthquake, down upon her being. And in a confused way, it seemed as if it were Timothy, acting by God's direction, who had brought about the cataclysm. A further glance brought her consciousness of a phenomenon unknown to her—the elemental masculine transfigured by passion.

She said at last, rather humbly and feebly:

"Well. That's why."

He said: "Yes, I know."

She plucked up courage. "If so, why have you let her go on like this?"

He answered: "Who am I to stand between a woman and her soul? I accepted all she could give and gave her what she could accept."

They had neared each other. Quickly she grasped his coat lapels.

"If she would accept everything you had to give? If she knew that for you there was no barrier? If you told her that you could be all in all to each other?"

Timothy said: "For me—good God! There's no barrier."

She broke away, panting, and pointed to the door.

"Then go and tell her so."

He stared uncomprehending. She stamped an impatient foot.

"She left me here—was to call for me in an hour's time. The hour's long past. Go. She's waiting for you downstairs in the taxi."

He threw open the door and dashed out and flew along the long dark corridor in a staggering limp, and out down the two or three steps into the street.

A taxi-cab was drawn up by the kerb, the driver asleep on his box. Timothy wrenched open the door. It was she.

He cried: "Valerie, Valerie."

There was a flash of agonized questioning in her dark eyes. She read in his the enormous answer; and when he stumbled into the cab, she threw her arms about his neck.

THE END